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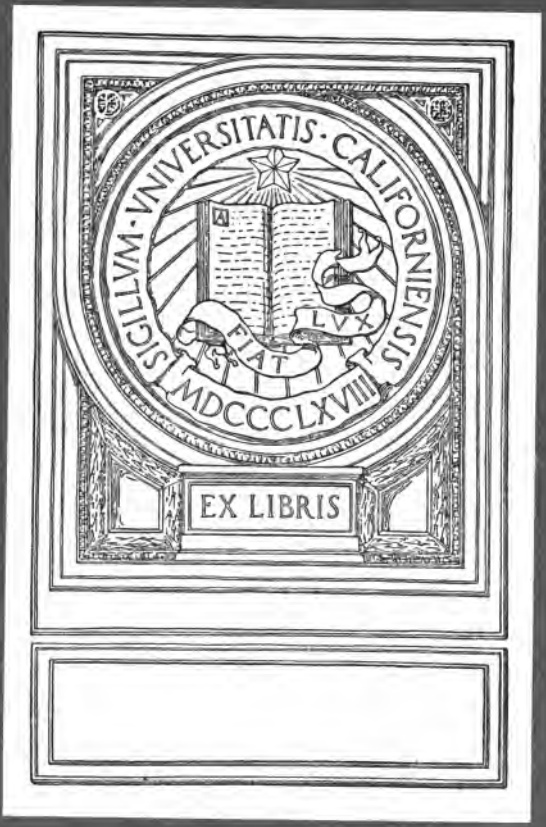
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Ursula Trent

BY

W. L. GEORGE

Author of "Caliban" "Hail Columbia" Etc.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

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Books by W. L. GEORGE

Ursula Trent
Hail, Columbia!
Caliban
Woman and Tomorrow
Until the Day Break
The Strangers' Wedding
The Second Blooming
Little Beloved
The Intelligence of Woman
The Individualist
The City of Light
A Bed of Roses
Blind Alley

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URSULA TRENT

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Dedicated in Friendship
To
H. L. MENCKEN

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PART I. THE GREAT HOUSE

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

URSULA TRENT

Chapter I

Through a Glass Darkly

I

A MAN said to me once (I was manicuring him then), "To be a husband is a whole-time job." And I thought, "To be a woman is a whole-time job." Yet I am not sorry that I was born a woman. When I think how often some girl has said to me, "Oh, I wish I were a man," and how it has never happened to a man to say to me that he wished he were a woman, I cannot help feeling that women don't understand what they can get out of themselves. They don't dare, I suppose. To an intelligent woman who's not too ugly men are the white sheet of paper on which we write our lives.

These have been good years for women, the years I remember. I am lucky to have been born in time to see a great war, to see history made obvious. I am glad to have lived and to be living in days of speed and force when, as one looks for a metaphor, one doesn't see life as a heron rising from the marsh and drawing across a pallid sky the elliptical curve of his flight; my period is like a cinema; things rush to blot one another out. And life is like a ground mist that an ever-changing wind molds and dispels.

I look through my latticed window at the hollyhocks that stoop like very young girls that have grown too fast, and tell myself that these nine years were worth it, all the pain and the uncertainty, for I was in tune with my time. I had no sense of being a foreigner. So many of us are foreigners among mankind and hold on with weak hands to the habits of a people we never knew, to traditions long dead. I

escaped that, and so, for a moment (the wind is springing up and one of the hollyhocks sheds a few of its pink cockades), I turn backward the handle of the camera, to see the film reverse itself. What crowds of faces! Faces that I would touch again, and faces that to see is nightmare; men's faces, some eager and young, or painted with hideous greed, with covetousness of me, and faces that feel not, neither do express. Girls' faces, too—fine healthy faces where the sunburn masks blushes, who never knew pain and so never grew into women; others so pitiful because they were soft, and others more pitiful because they were hard.

What a jumble life is! It all clots up: the manicure parlor, my nursery at Ciber Court, London Bridge and A B C's, underground dancing rooms with purple ceilings spangled with stars, where rough music lets flat despair emerge from its jazzian jollity, bits of blue sky spattered with white rags of cloud above green hedges, and in the middle, as the master of Juggernaut, Piccadilly Circus, the vortex of London. I got out. Am I sorry that I got out into Peace Harbor? I've settled down. But can one settle down?

II

How badly I've put all this! But who can describe the picture that is made of colored glass in a kaleidoscope? Yet I'm intelligent. Often I wish I'd been educated. It isn't enough to be intelligent, and Fräulein used to say that though I learned easily there was no knowing what I wouldn't forget. She thought me a queer child. Lots of people have said that; they've called me a cure, a caution, deep one. A young man whose name I have forgotten, with a pretty face like a soap advertisement, and a golden mustache like a fixatif advertisement, and neat little clothes . . . well, never mind the other advertisements . . . called me a singular young person. I suppose he meant I was feminine. We puzzle them. No wonder, when I reflect how they puzzle us. But they confess their perplexity and we don't; that's our strength, I suppose.

Yes, I'm intelligent. I'm also pretty. I'm neither very vain nor very scheming nor untruthful if I can help it. And, like ordinary people, I can play with big emotions in a small way. I've got small failings; I can be petty, bad tempered, slack, unreasonable, and know it, and go on all the same. That's because I'm intelligent; but sometimes I wish I were educated. Life seems so much easier for the educated; they trot along their educated lines and in the end are cremated in the most modern conditions. To-day, notably, I wish I were educated, because I want to tell the history of my life. The life of an individual is so hard to understand unless one also knows something about the life of mankind. That prevents one from thinking oneself exceptional. All the *facts* I know in English history are that the Conqueror came over in 1066, and that Charles I had his head cut off in 1649. In foreign history, I know that Charles XII fought Peter the Great at Poltava in 1709. That's because I used to play a piece of music called "The Battle of Poltava"; also, when I was fifteen, I was taken to a matinée at a music hall, got up, feeling very hot, and asked Datas the year of that battle. I shall never forget it, for fifteen hundred people were staring at me while I did it. I'm afraid that's all. But I *feel* history; I know that our everyday life is just history adjourned, and so all the past I know nothing of is alive with merchants like our profiteers, priests like our politicians. But I can't criticize my own times except through my emotions. How can I discuss the function of wealth, knowing no economics? I want to talk of love, and know no biology. What do I know of class wars? of metaphysics? of psychology? of the real stuff of life? I don't know anything except what I've seen. But I met a B.Sc. the other day, and she didn't know, either. Perhaps one can't know.

III

I tried. I really did want to know when I was small, especially the things they told me I'd understand when I was grown up. The trouble is people don't know things

when they're grown up. If one had to pass exams. every five years one might. I remember Fräulein trying to explain to me why the Australians don't fall off. She did it with an orange and two matches. Then she moved; the lower match did fall off, and she lost her temper. I don't yet understand why the Australians don't fall off. They made it worse at Eastbourne when the science master explained what was centrifugal force. It seems to me that if the earth does whirl round at I don't know how many miles an hour the Australians would not only fall off, but fly off. Facts can be very difficult to understand; perhaps that's why people are content with the temporary shadow made by the fleeting mist that we call life. They can see *that* in a way.

I am sitting down to write the history of my life. I'd like to begin: My name is Ursula Trent; I shall be thirty this year. I was born . . . But how dull it sounds! Besides, there are such frightful gaps. One doesn't remember. Sometimes I try to bring up the dissolving view that first met my conscious eyes. It is a very large room on the second floor of Ciber Court. I think it faces southwest, for it is the late afternoon and the sun shines. Something large and movable is by the window. It may be a rocking-horse. I have a sense of effort, of holding on. The window sill? Then I must be looking, perhaps for the first time on my feet, at the great and mysterious city in the valley that in a year or two I shall learn to call Burleigh Abbas. A few years later I shall discover it as a village of eighty houses, collected round the post office, that is also the general shop.

I turn the handle, turn it, turn it, and the film is blank, until I eat cream cakes at Mrs. Robertson's in Grafton Street, and a cross old lady, wearing a transformation, turns round from the next table and requests the child not to fidget. Then I am a woman of fourteen; I fall in love, am stirred to mysterious sensualities by harsh, boyish kisses; then almost at once I am faithless. An examiner asks me how the Crusades came about. I don't know the answer then. To-day I can't credit it.

I suppose it was a good life, for one didn't feel it go by so

fast; time is long when one is young because one desires what one can't get; later one only gets what one can't desire. One couldn't help being happy as a child at Ciber Court. I went down the other day; it hasn't changed since I held on to the window sill any more, I suppose, than it changed between my childhood and the day when the first Trent knifed in the back somebody that Henry VIII didn't like, was made a baronet, learned to sign his name, and grew respectable. Ciber Court doesn't get old. It has got stuck in the corridors of Time, and that half makes me understand why the Socialists want to clear it away. What a pity it would be to clear away Ciber Court! The low house of gray stone between the two cobby towers; the Queen Anne chimney stacks, whose brick clashes horribly; even the new wing that my great-grandfather built to house his twelve children. Why a pity, I don't know, but when I stand in the drive, looking at the lawn, close-cropped in herringbone pattern, at the two ducks cut out of box bushes by the porch, I feel once more that I am holding on to the window sill, the only thing that doesn't move while the film streams on, quivering and blotched.

I suppose I had to leave all that. I had to live. I'm not a Jane Austen girl, sneaking the jam from the emotional pantry. I'm greedy and bad mannered. I want my jam in public. Pots of it. I'd have gone crazy if I'd had to pretend to be an Elizabeth Bennett, though there's some secretive Elizabeth in all of us. So many things we must hide from men: our physical preoccupations, because every man likes to think that we haven't got any until we meet him; our maneuvers to attract and secure those creatures that are so fanciful, so much more nervous and irresponsible than we; our exploitations of men, this rare revenge of ours; our contempt for man's apparent lack of sensitiveness, the insensitiveness which makes man so incredibly attractive; we have to hide that, and our respect for his obstinacy, the sturdy density of the creature. Also we must encourage the perpetual appeal of a weakness which we half affect, which increases his sense of strength and self-reliance; we have to

flatter his masculinity and yet at the same time always make him feel how weak he is when confronted with the physical impulses that we can arouse in him.

I hate men; I love them. I hate the things they hide from us—their successive coarse love affairs; their private conversation, made up of unpleasant stories or of foolish ideas about golf, etchings, tobacco. Yet I delight in their crudity; it makes them massive. I hate their consciousness of conquest, their secret contempt for women, and yet that contempt deliciously subordinates me. I hate the strength that makes them conquer us, yet I call to it, and I hate the hatred they feel for us sometimes, when they are ashamed of being conquered. Their selfishness annoys me, because they want things for themselves, while I want things for my man. I realize that is selfishness in another form, because it hurts me when my man has not all he wants. Only man's selfishness differs from mine, and I don't like that. And what I hate most is that the man should preserve things which are not mine—his work, a club, a friend or two whom I do not favor. My man is mine; perhaps that is why I say that I am his. Men are not greedy enough of us. Some of them treat us like their equals. Equality! What a disgusting relationship! I prefer the idealists who grant us our own way, as they put it, and call it tolerance, while it's only indifference. Or even the dense brutes. At bottom I am too proud to be merely a man's equal.

I've tried to tell these things to men. They've thought them amusing. I talk too much; I don't conceal enough of my past and of my present moods. I kill the mystery which produces irritation and interest. Of course, when a man comes to know us it increases his sense of mastery, and he may despise us for that, or rejoice in us for that. One just doesn't know. Every man is very mysterious, and the life of a woman with a man is a series of experiments.

IV

A hand is laid upon my neck, caresses it. I do not move. I know that in a moment he will draw away my hair a little

more from the temples. He likes me scragged, and I hate it. But what is one to do when one loves? One can become ugly in one's own eyes, so that the beloved may think one beautiful. I let the hard, pleasant fingers draw back my hair, now and then pretending to growl with anger. This pleases him; it enhances his pleasure in dominating me.

"What are you doing?" he asks, at length.

"I am writing the story of my life."

He laughs. "That's a big job. I'm afraid you'll never finish it. Besides . . . the best chapters are still unwritten."

I'm thirty, nearly. I wonder.

Chapter II

Sea Anemones

I

IT is a good thing to be pretty. At least, I suppose I'm pretty, unless I'm rather more. It is so difficult to know just what one looks like when one sees oneself only in the silvery falsehood of a mirror, and occasionally in the golden falsehood of a man's eyes that glimpse one through a curtain of illusion. Still, I do believe it when I look at an old photograph of myself, taken before the war, when I was twenty-two. It is a good photograph by Norman Bark, with one of those semi-Oriental, semimisty backgrounds which he likes. He has placed me on an oak chest, my knees crossed, my arms outstretched over an open copy of *Country Life*. How long my arms look! They were rather thin then. Though I suspect that Bark touched them up a little, I have thick, slightly raw hands, the hands of a country girl. I'm very dark skinned; under the ninon blouse I can see the shadowy outline of the shoulder that was a little thin, flowing to a rather long but thick neck shadowed with down. At that time I am powerfully made, but undeveloped. My figure is slight; I remember the bony, sinew-bound knees which I showed when bathing, and which shamed me because they lacked feminine roundness and delicacy. All that has changed, for I have filled out. Now I have a dimple at my elbow, and thinner hands. But my face has not changed much. Still I wear my rather coarse, almost black hair close about the crown and thickly coiled over the back of my head. There was a wreath of ivy leaves round my head, and I wore a necklace of seed pearls. My forehead is low, but looks high because my head is narrow and long. Set

wide apart about a faintly tip-tilted nose lie my eyes that are large, deep brown, very thickly lashed, and always outlined by an aura whose purple melts into sepia and at the edge disappears into the darker flush of my dark cheeks. Dead-black, fairly level brows overhang my eyes. This gives an effect of brooding and melancholy. When I am thinking of nothing men always believe that I am being soulful. I suppose it is my mouth misleads them, for it is rather thick, especially the upper lip; the under lip falls away a little, showing a gleam of teeth; it makes me look forlorn, and I might be thought weak if there were not big bones in my jaw. I'm deceptive; men cannot guess whether my somber feebleness may easily be abused, or whether I shall suddenly turn hard, or even furious. I am not very tall, but though I talk a lot, my voice is quiet. My husband is right; he knows the hardness in me that mixes with my dependence; and how suddenly dependence can turn into the rage he likes to dispel.

I remember. I wore that frock in May, at the garden party which we gave the tenants. It was so funny. The farmers in hard hats that weren't exactly bowlers, and the new agent, a young man, a terrific dandy with a blue-spotted tie the spots of which were rather too large. The local notables, the two doctors, very jealous of each other, and therefore going about like intimate friends; Mr. Bowden, who, I believe, asked every girl he met when he would have the pleasure of officiating at her wedding. Dear Mr. Bowden! How he perspired in his hot, clerical clothes. Rather an unpopular clergyman, for he hated censuring anybody, and was then in trouble with the churchwardens because he refused to turn out couples from church on a rainy Sunday. He was very sore about it, and put it to me with an air of rosy protest while eating a strawberry ice:

"They say that these young people behave in an unseemly way. Well, well, youth is the time for unseemly behavior, within reasonable bounds. They actually wanted me to tell these young people to go and hold hands against a wet stile or in a bar parlor. My dear young lady, I feel that

much good and no evil can come from holding hands in the House of Him who loved little children."

I laughed. "But, Mr. Bowden," I said, in a shocked tone, "surely you would object if . . . betrothals took place in your church."

"No," said the old man, so thoughtful that he did not notice the steady trickle of the melting ice on to his black trousers. "No. I wouldn't object. How will people believe that He is a God of love if He persecutes lovers?"

I wonder what they made of him, the churchwardens, especially Mr. Felstead, our local solicitor, who in his life had committed only one aphorism—"Love brings lots of business to lawyers, but apart from that it's a damned nuisance." I remember so many of these parties, where the notables were scattered. At the last moment one used to send frantic notes to the daughters of a neighboring house. One asked Lady Edderton to let Verena and Claribel come. One was at one's wits' end. The second housemaid was ill; also one had just heard that Mrs. Balcombe was refusing to stand at the same buffet as Lady Moffat, because Lady Moffat had not returned her call. One didn't press Mr. and Mrs. Wardle, who possessed much money, but no attractions, had many children, and brought them all. Sometimes Sir Fitzwater Ingham would appear, sit down in a deck chair in the middle of the garden, and expect to have every pretty girl brought up in turn, looking, with his immense, bead-like nose and heavy yellow mustache, like a Crusader who'd lost his map of the Holy Land.

One has to do these things. One gives garden parties. When they're over one says, "We sha'n't have to have another until next June." One goes to garden parties, and when one gets away one says, "That's that." One goes on doing it all the same, because in a funny, excited way one likes the movement, the various faces, the lady with the nine pink bows on her blouse, and because Claribel will tell one a secret about Lewis, nearly as thrilling as the one she told a month ago about Cyril. One wears a pretty frock for the first time, and some man may say so without knowing

what he means, or a woman may say so, knowing what she means and in a spirit of desperate hate. It's nice. Like Irish stew. One may find anything in it.

I was very happy before the war, for I liked everything. I loved dances, and was one of the first to exhibit the improper tango at the county ball at Basingalton. Also, I loved hunting, the aviator feeling when the horse rises to a fence, and the queer, swoony sensation of forty minutes without a check. When I close my eyes I can feel the heavy going. Rhythmically I rise and sink. . . . I half close my eyes. . . . I glimpse the huntsman's coat, to lose it again. Sometimes I am in at the death, very hot, dirty, half frightened, half excited, a pulse beating in my side, as the yapping chorus of the hounds concentrates round the invisible fox, and suddenly turns into a lower chorus of growls. I am horrified, yet my eyes feel wet and soft. I want to look at people and to smile stupidly, as if I were drugged. For in the bracken, hidden by those shaking, spotted white flanks, those quivering sterns, tragedy is happening. I surprise an incredible instinct. I want that fox broken up. I got the brush for the first time when I was seventeen. They blooded me, and I came down to dinner with a dirty face because I wouldn't wash off the glorious sign.

Men were nice to me. I refused two men before I was twenty. Then came Lord Oswald. Sometimes I wish I had married him, if only to know what he was really like. Oswald embarrassed one, because he was so aloof, so self-contained. Just then he was about thirty, extraordinarily good-looking in a faintly monastic way. Every feature was fine, burnt goldy-brown by open air and exercise. One couldn't just call him an outdoor man, and though he was a politician with the orthodox Tory views of his class, one could not just call him a politician. He was such a radical Tory. I think I would have wholly loved Oswald if I could have understood what was expressed in his rather slaty gray eyes, whether it was coldness or fanaticism, disdain or despair. Once, as we stood in the embrasure of a win-

dow in the ballroom at Edderton Hall, he said to me suddenly:

"Nothing changes. Yet is it our business, we politicians, to alter appearances. Men don't change; we merely make them new clothes." Then he stared at me with those soft and desperate eyes of his, and said: "One doesn't know where one is, does one, with old customs trampled down, and we replacing them by new laws, new laws for the old sort of men? It's like men and women. There you stand before me . . . so lovely. If we grew to love each other, would we change? We'd be married, well, yes, new clothes for two people. You can't make men Siamese Twins by special license."

I didn't say anything. What could I say? Was he proposing to me? So I laughed and said something idiotic, like, "Oh, it doesn't do to think of those things." He flung me a look of pain, took my hand, hesitated, as if about to kiss it, and, sighing, let it go again.

It was horrible; it was as if I had failed him in something. I understand him better now, for Oswald was in the horrible state of being tempted to democracy, though the son of an earl. Yet, being intellectual, he did not trust the democracy that called to him. He ached for change, and did not believe change possible. So he felt incredible revolt against his own order, yet could not ally to the new order. He was another of those foreigners in life, like the phantom ship beating through Eternity round the Cape of Little Hope.

II

A very different man from the members of his order in the county. It seems that the aristocracy now and then throws up something like Oswald, somebody like Lord Hugh Cecil or Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, unless it take the disabused form of Mr. Balfour. The old vigor of the aristocrat, that translated itself once into perilous loyalty to some blackguard king, or into treachery to a good friend, that made murderous barons, incestuous cardinals, and dukes

who cheated at cards, failed, I think, to emerge from men like Oswald, infirm of will because doubtful of any goal. If I knew more history, if I did more than understand emotionally what the great dead were, I might have understood Oswald. But I could only half love him, half love him in a terrified, irritated way. I was viewing him as he viewed the world, with desire and doubt.

It was that, I suppose, made me think one day: "What a fool I am to worry about Oswald! He hasn't asked me to marry him. And if he did, would I be much better off with Frank Coriesmore, who's going to propose to me soon, and who's fat, and round, and rosy, and jolly, and a sailor, and the youngest commander in the navy but two? A nice house in Southsea! Our children, round and rosy and etc. . . . and in blue. Frank would land, having been a fortnight at sea, and shout for the last two numbers of *Punch*. *Punch* and kisses, and all well. Frank Coriesmore, compared with Oswald, gave one a pretty clear idea of the quality of those families from one of which I spring. In those days I didn't understand them as I do now. It has taken a war to make me see them as they are—sea anemones. These county families, you can watch them for generations as you can for hours (which to sea anemones are a great part of a generation), watch the brown, semiopaque animals hold up in placid pools ineffectual and lovely hands to nutriment which they need not seek: a kindly Destiny has so arranged it that nutriment shall of itself enter their languid grasp. I didn't see all that then. I hadn't been a nurse and found out that there's lots of blood inside a man; nor a government servant, and realized there's lots of beastliness in him; nor worked for wages; nor seen what a harlequin's coat is daily life. No harlequin in the counties, but only people garbed in the tweed best suited to their complexions, the tweed of their fathers, fated to be the tweed of their sons. When I think of the country gentlemen and the wives made necessary by the instinct of self-reproduction and the governance of a large house, I am overwhelmed by the justice of my comparison with the sea anemone. I used to think them dull,

the hard-mouthed women who rode the soft-mouthed horses; the elderly ladies who could afford to dress worse than their cooks because they were All Right; the squires, with their queer, clipped language, their G-lessness, their "ain'ts," and their "don'tchers." I recall the static panorama of Hodge, in the taproom, his enormous clay-caked boots stretched out to the vermilion fire, smoking a clay pipe and chewing the cud, his dull eyes resting through the window on the cow that squats outside, chewing the cud, too. It has been going on for centuries, and I wonder whether, when a sea anemone dies, a junior sea anemone drifts along on the movements of the sea, which are like those of Time; whether it drops upon a rock and notices the place on the rock where less slime is deposited than on the rest; and whether it negligently drops its anchors on that spot . . . just as James, son of William, William, son of Howard, drops his anchor at Ciber Court.

One has only to listen to their talk. Now that it all lies so far away, nine years that include a war, I perceive a greater clarity in these remembered scraps of talk, the half-reluctant talk of people wo do not talk easily.

III

When I think of these sea anemones, soon my father comes up before me, and usually the same picture at the same time. Lunch is finished. My father is playing with his coffee spoon and staring into the smoke that rises from his cigar. Mamma is looking at him doubtfully, from pleasant brown eyes that are a little lighter than mine. She is awaiting the fit moment to rise and leave the room. I wait the time of her rising. I am aware that behind the red-baize door at the end of the dining room the butler, and within the butler's zone of influence other menials, are awaiting that later fit moment when my father shall rise, too, and leave the room. There is a little hush, the hush of attendance upon Sir William Rodwin Trent, eighth baronet, playing with his coffee spoon. The hush also of half past two on a rather

warm day. The hush that follows a well-cooked lunch. The volutes of blue smoke curl and uncurl about the sea anemone enthroned in its Georgian armchair. What is he thinking of? Was it not written that he should be eighth baronet because there was a seventh? Did he not go to Oxford just as he would have gone to Cambridge, with equal fervor and predestination, if he had been born seven miles away, at Edderton Hall?

I'm laughing at him, but I mean no harm. I love him. He so seldom had a cross word for me, even on the day when, at the age of seven, I was taken to see the Prince of Wales open the Thames Institute. I clove through the hush in a high, childish voice, pointed at the sacred personage, and asked, "Who's that fat man?" Only papa . . . well, will my children think me funny? Is every generation the joke of the next, and the admiration of the next but two? It is difficult to believe that papa's generation will ever be the admiration of anybody. For the picture persists. As mamma rises, papa follows, takes my arm, and accompanies us to the drawing-room. We stop for a moment in the hall. On the bearskin before the fire Belinda, our old bloodhound, is waiting, and, though it is June, believes that she is warming herself by the empty grate. For Belinda warms herself there in December, and she is a martyr to tradition. We go to her. Her tail swishes; she sits up, and rests upon us the immense melancholy of her little blood-zoned eyes. We give her a bit of cheese. Papa says, "Good . . . dog" (he picks his words before me), "good stock." He plays with her long ears. "If the bench weren't packed with a lot of sentimentalists and cranks and faddists, we'd soon run the poachers to earth, eh, Bell, old gal?" We go into the drawing-room; Belinda pads softly behind us to the door, looks in hopelessly. My father, as she expects, says, "Go back." Depressedly, she goes back. This has happened every day for nine years, but to crave admittance to the drawing-room is the tradition of Belinda Trent—I mean Belinda the bloodhound. Papa is still talking about the bench. He likes being a J. P. and fining motorists and mak-

ing people abate nuisances. As he smokes he develops. I suspect that he is approaching social questions. Indeed, he is. "You coming to the meeting at Basingalton tomorrow night? Some sort of Tariff Reform, what-you-call-it affair. Got to take the chair, but I'm hanged if I'll talk."

His fine lips purse. Evidently he is afraid that he will have to talk about Tariff Reform. "Course it's all right. Walter Long believes in it. Still, one gets tied up in their figures." Papa doesn't like Tariff Reform much, nor the All Red Route, nor the colonies. It's all so jolly commercial at bottom; besides, he's met colonials, and doesn't like their accent. Lot of Yanks, he says, privately. Indeed, the evolution of politics is a nuisance. He is entirely a man of the land, and what matters to him is the raising of stock, the production of good crops, and all that arises from these simplicities, such as the horse show, the cattle show, the flower show, quarter sessions, the meet, the hunt ball, the church restoration fund. He is not an Imperialist; he is a Conservative. Of course, the colonies come in handy; India provides jobs for one's nephews, and if there's a rotter in the family, it takes him a long time to get home from Australia.

At that time my father had, however, certain political passions, mainly hatreds. He wasn't always like that. I remember very well that, when I was twelve, he favored a sort of Conservative-Liberalism. The Liberal candidate, who lived near Reading, came to dinner rather often, with a very pretty young wife. Until then I suspect that my father talked to Liberals in a democratic way suited to their strange aberration. He didn't mind them. But horrible things must have happened to him. I grew up to the sound of diatribes against Campbell-Bannerman, who gave back the Transvaal to the Boers. My father quarreled with the Liberals. He ceased to talk to any of the gang. Some of the Liberals were tradesmen; by degrees he ceased to distinguish between a Liberal and a shopkeeper. Still, he didn't bother much; by degrees they passed into the class of harmless vermin which misplaced humanitarianism forbade him to

shoot. It was only later on, when Labor appeared in politics, that a more definite anger began to pervade my father's conversation. Whereas, in the case of Liberals, as in the case of mice, one merely put in a cat to keep them down, after eight or nine years he began to see that Labor would require at least good sporting terriers. Whereas the Liberals couldn't do anything to the land because the House of Lords would always see to them in time, he found out that Labor wanted to do away with the House of Lords. From this period I collect only the phrase "opening the floodgates of revolution." I think it was Labor that gave my father a more profound interest in politics. He really tried. I can see him bending over his desk, a very handsome man of fifty-four, pepper and salt about the head, hair clipped so close that it exposes the brown cracked surface of the skin. Nose beautifully cut, rather pugnacious; the mouth thick, but sensitive; the lower lip pouting with an imperious air above the obstinate, jutting chin. His nice, large brown hands, with the square-cut finger nails, hold a pamphlet about rural housing. Somebody gave it to him in Reading. After a while he says:

"I don't know what the row's about, Ursula. These fellows put up all sorts of newfangled ideas about bathrooms and . . . and other things. Want every cottage to have a parlor. Anybody can see they've never been beyond the four-mile radius. Bathrooms! If they brought in compulsory baths, it 'd kill half Burleigh Abbas. Shock, you know."

Papa is things as they are. He is not blind. He knows that the roofs leak, that some of our cottages have only two bedrooms, where grown-up families sleep, Heaven knows how; he knows that the drinking water comes from wells that haven't been cleaned since Cœur de Lion; he knows that most of the windows aren't made to open. And he explains it all by saying that people don't want them to open, which, unfortunately, is quite true. He sums up, "Let 'em keep 'em shut if they like it." It sounds like freedom, but I am not sure it isn't freedom to be slaves. This talk bothers him. He is disturbed; he is not deeply impressed by agrarian

troubles, demands for houses, for high wages, or by the steady migration of the young people to Reading and London. He is disturbed, but not anxious, because he cannot believe that anybody will really interfere with the land: that would be novelty.

It seemed natural, then, but, now that I've been poor, lived in one room, and eaten as I earned, I think of papa, of all the money he was getting out of the world, without doing anything much in exchange. He's still doing it, and thousands of his class with him. The war hasn't blown up the system; perhaps it's helped it to crumble . . . if it is crumbling. Dear papa, was he justifying himself in the world? producing anything? leading anybody? Or was he just, like most landlords, merely a gentle beast of prey, taking a peck of corn out of the bushel the farmer worked to raise? Was he doing anything for the world except to be an eighth baronet?

Chapter III

Oswald Passes

I

IF I were writing a novel, if I were not, greatly for my own pleasure and a little for my vanity, writing the story of my life, I could not, as I am about to do, put two and a half years of war into a single chapter. And yet it's easy. Forgetfulness wraps our memories like the grass that grows on the trenches. One remembers "The Better 'Ole," though one thinks that one could fill a whole volume with the impressions of the first day. But then I didn't receive impressions. I just had excitements, like other girls. You know, uniforms, and guns going off in places far enough away to be safe. And a wild feeling of artificial hatred against the Germans, artificial, I mean, because one didn't imagine Germans properly; they felt rather like villains at Drury Lane.

I suppose my engagement with Oswald had something to do with that. I don't want to be thought heartless, but on the day of the massacre at Vise, Oswald proposed to me. I shall never recover such a moment. He had come to say good-by, and was already in khaki. Oswald was the sort of man whom the tailor would serve first and best. He looked extraordinarily handsome; he was one of the men whose complexion khaki suits. The brass buttons caught up the golden brown of his cheeks; he looked such a soldier with his hair cut closer than usual. I don't think I loved him until then, for now he was no longer uncertain and tortured. His gray eyes had lost all uncertainty as he said, "This is going to be a big job, so it's a good thing we're starting early." Then, after a pause, in that grave, pleasant voice of his, he said, without hesitation, without doubt, as

if facing another job: "Ursula, I've loved you for four years and never told you so, because I was a doubting fool. But there's no time for doubts now. If you care for me, will you marry me on my first leave?"

I did not reply at once. Somehow I was disappointed. It ought to have been more fervent. I wanted him to tremble under the shadow of death, so that I might weep. I don't mean tremble, unless the Crusaders trembled. I suppose they did. I nearly said "No," and he, being sensitive, must have felt it, for something passed in his eyes, like a gull nose-diving. He seized my hands and crushed them, as if he hated me, wanted to hurt me. He looked mad. So I told myself, "It is I who am driving him mad," and an immensely soft, warm feeling of power filled me. I half wished he would go mad. Then . . . one can't analyze beyond a certain point, his passion and that glimpsed despair, the powerful excitement of the times, this sudden sense of my mastery blended with my weakness. I was afraid of this world around me, quivering like the lid of a kettle that boils. Oswald looked strong and permanent; I wanted the shelter of his arms. I found myself there without knowing how, nearly crying with excitement. And when he lifted my head to kiss me, to give me the first kiss of the lips of a true lover, I had a sense of ease. Like discovering the solution of a problem. At last I kissed his slightly rough cheek in abandonment, and that moment was overlooked by the scythe of time.

II

I went into a hospital at Woking. After the early rebellion against scrubbing and dishwashing, came the Gustave Doré hell. Think of it: in my whole life I'd seen nothing worse than a cut finger . . . and when at last I was qualified, my first operation was a leg amputation. I laugh at myself now as I remember the beads of cold sweat upon my forehead, as I listened to the grating of the saw on the bone, and Doctor Chorley's voice coming to me through a pale-yellow

mist, "If you're going to be sick, go outside." I suppose that within a year I could have seen men fried alive while I ate chocolates. One might think—at least, people say so—that this sort of thing must harden a girl. Well, I don't know. It takes a lot to harden or to soften people for good. People who never have done it get a fanciful idea of nurses. They seem to think that we are sweet angels, like Florence Nightingale, smoothing the fevered brow of the wounded hero, and that in our other hand we hold a lamp. They forget that most lamps are difficult to sterilize. Radiating sweet womanhood indeed! We never radiated anything but lysol. I think lysol is my most permanent impression of the war. I never quite got used to it. It clung even to the soup. And bismuth was worse. It was bismuth, I think, that brought about my friendship with a private whom I knew only as Tim, who remarked to me: "Smells like a fairy bower, don't it, nurse? which shows that there's pros and cons in this war. It's smelly out there, but there's more variety."

Nurse Garthorpe hated the patients. Yet she hated me because they liked me. I can still feel her very light-blue eyes watching me through her pale eyelashes, and see her long upper lip lift with an air of contempt. She hated me so much that at first she tried to save me and to take me to church. After her failure, I think I can conclude from certain of her expressions, the cheerful ones, that she rejoiced in the idea that I would be damned. Well, if I am, I hope she'll be there to see me; it will ease her own pains.

Already the others are dim, except Doctor Chorley, converted from a man into a machine that said things like, "That 'll do, nurse; don't fuss." Or, "I asked you for a sponge, not for your opinion." But young Doctor Upnor passes for a moment across the screen, a more interesting figure. He was very dark, about thirty, and he hadn't the rages of Doctor Chorley. The old man was furious because his violent patriotism and his equally violent emotions had compelled him to leave his practice. Doctor Upnor was a ship's doctor and just before the war had come ashore to marry. His marriage did not prevent his seeking my com-

pany and giving me unnecessary trouble with charts, or sending for me to bring up the medical sheets of cases entirely devoid of interest. At the end, he was even so clumsy that he insisted on examining my right hand for a fancied deviation of the metacarp. It was not my fault, for of course I wasn't allowed to wear my engagement ring. Also, he interested me. He was not a rigid Socialist, but rather a man who had picked up ideas in the wardroom, a place where one must discuss life and things when one's at sea and the newspapers are a week old. But I didn't think of him much until later, for, in December, 'fourteen, while on night patrol, Oswald was killed. We were to have been married at the end of January, when he expected to get leave. He was killed just as I was about to put in for leave to buy my trousseau. So at first nobody knew at the hospital, and this helped me, for I had no time to absorb myself in what would have been an immense grief. No time for grief . . . that's almost the history of the war. I remember well the note from Lady Halkyn. It was so short and just what it ought to have been from the sweet woman she was:

MY POOR CHILD,—Oswald was killed the day before yesterday. We are both very unhappy. Try to work hard. I am old and can only pray.

I read it two or three times; it came by the second post. Then we went in to lunch. It was boiled beef and dumpling. I had a second helping of dumpling without quite knowing what I was doing. Then, in a sort of stupor, I washed up. I wasn't qualified then.

And that's nearly all. It was only a little later that I began to regret Oswald, that I found myself ill with a sort of reaction from excitement. There had been so little that I felt the future ought to have held a great deal; it had come just as, half afraid, half curious, I realized that in a few weeks I should be a new creature, a woman, no longer preoccupied, pure still, impure by license. People think young girls don't brood over these things, but we do; we're so horribly ignorant that we brood more than the passionate

male; he has nothing to learn. Now the fearful hope was gone; he lay dead out there. It wasn't like dying at home. I was seeing men die slowly. One was told things about their condition. There was chatter about an operation. But being killed out there, it just meant that somebody who had already gone out of one's life figured still less in it. First Oswald was, and then he wasn't. Besides, I had too much to do. It was that feeling, no doubt, made me tell Doctor Upnor nearly a year later. "Am I a beast?" I said. "Do you think I am heartless?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "Well . . . no. Feelings aren't compulsory. A thing affects you in one way or in another. People say it's your heart. I say it's your solar plexus."

"That's a very material way of putting it."

"You can't get away from it. Sometimes I think that love is merely a morbid secretion of the reproductive instinct. We have degenerated a lot from the animals. The stag doesn't ask himself whether his mate is well bred or well off. If he loses his mate, the next does quite as well." He smiled. "In that sense we may not be so different, after all."

I laughed. One can't help liking cynicism when it goes far enough. That day we had a long talk. It wandered away from Oswald into a little personal history, and Doctor Upnor suddenly revealed an unreasonable democratic hatred of my class.

"You people," he said, "these wars are good for you. Gives you a touch of reality. It's not good for anybody to drink his chocolate out of a Rockingham cup. It cuts you off from the fact that most of the world is drinking stewed tea out of chipped mugs. Ever seen a breakfast table where no two bits of crockery match?"

"No," I said, "but is it necessary?"

"It is. Just that you should know it. The illusions of the poor about the rich are nothing to those of the rich about the poor. People like you are like Marie Antoinette, and say to the people who clamor because they have no bread, 'Well, let 'em eat cake.'"

"Well," I said, aggressively, "I can't help being what I am."

He softened. "Oh, it's not a charge against you I'm making. I'm not even so impertinent as to offer my sympathy. But, you know, one way and another, I've had a lot to do with people of position on ships, ladies, especially; they're generally bad sailors: one can afford to when one's got a maid who isn't. And, on the whole, I think the position is they're rather a slack, irresolute crowd."

"The men know how to die," I said.

"Yes, but they don't know how to live. They merely knock balls about. Golf balls, tennis balls, cricket balls. They'll take a swipe at anything except the globe. I doctored a Cabinet Minister once. He didn't know the difference between Silesia and Sicily, and his one idea of intellectual recreation was jig-saw puzzles. At other times he slept or ordered people about. Fortunately his civil servants altered his instructions, and no harm was done. If you don't mind me saying so, all these people born rich and wealthy, they're like whales thrown up on the beach by the industrial movements of the world. They lie on the beach and heave, taking up the space of millions of respectable winkles. And, by some zoological prodigy, they have lungs as well as gills, and so they go on heaving and heaving, and will go on until the inspired winkles heave them back into the sea."

I thought he talked nonsense, though perhaps it isn't so far from whales to sea anemones. Doctor Upnor saw the upper class large, because he wasn't of them; being of them, I saw them small. But he stimulated me, and a sort of respect, as if for Oswald, prevented him from making advances to me that day. He was kind, really, pointed out that I was very young, and added: "After all, they say that man who has suffered from woman can be healed by none save woman. Likewise, women who lose their lovers in war at the hands of men can, I suppose, be healed by men."

I owe a great deal to Doctor Upnor; he taught me to read. Before I knew him I was well content with the novels of Locke and E. F. Benson; my greatest earnestness led me

to Mr. E. V. Lucas. Doctor Upnor gave me library lists, and through him I came to know the novel of significance, the poems of Sassoon, the irreverence of Lytton Strachey. He broke my mind open. But I was not to stay in the hospital to the end of the war. It was not only that Doctor Chorley was too rude, and Doctor Upnor too kind; it was that the women rejoiced too much in that rudeness and that kindness. Toward the end of 1916, I had gone up to Doctor Upnor's room with a paper, I forget what, but it was quite genuine. Just as we had finished, Matron came in, looked at us, said nothing, said that nothing which between women amounts to a shout of anger. I didn't think about it any more. I went home on leave for a week, and found the sea anemones were turning into almost invisible microbes. Papa was recruiting, standing on carts and talking about glory and duty . . . and I couldn't help thinking it queer, I, who the day before had been clearing up fingers and bits of flesh. We were having an "at home" for the Prince of Wales's Fund; people were still knitting; the papers were seeing the funny side of the war, which I, being a woman, I suppose, never grasped. Of that visit I retain a confused impression of everybody being busy in connection with the war, saving food, or getting married, but at bottom eating as usual, marrying as usual, and covertly cursing because hunting as usual wasn't done. I had a vision of my sea anemones detached from their rock by an unexampled storm, and drifting about a little: as soon as the storm subsided they would slowly sink again to the bottom of the equable, immemorial waters, and fasten once more to the same old spot with the same old tentacles.

I went back to the hospital, and, a week later, for no reason except that I was what he called unsuitable, Doctor Chorley asked me to resign. Matron, I suppose. It is a funny feeling being, as I learned to call it, sacked. One is excited, a personage; it must be very stimulating to be sentenced to be hanged, to be distinguished from one's fellows. One goes about telling one's friends that one's going, and privately that one's got the sack; to one's semi-

enemies, one suggests that one wasn't going to stick it any longer and that one resigned. In a way one feels relieved: that bit of one's life work is done and the future opens. It is rather nice in a way: one is in life rather like a kitten entangled in a ball of wool, and, oh, the delight of suddenly escaping from the wool! One knows that life will probably tempt one into another entanglement, but it 'll be another, and one has to get very old in mind before one echoes the gloomy puppy of the picture postcard, who describes life as merely one damn thing after the other. Of course I didn't feel all that just then, not clearly. I mean that already after eighteen months of war, lysol, and liberty I was a very different girl from the hunting miss, the dancing miss, who liked the novels of Marie Corelli, improved her mind (on the sly) with the memoirs of Lady Cardigan, and saw life as a sort of cricket match between her class and the rest of the world. The rest being nowhere. In a way Doctor Upnor had something to do with it. I don't mean that he taught me things, but he stimulated something that was there, a sort of mental curiosity which hadn't been satisfied. For instance, in our last talk, the day I left the hospital, I remember that in a fit of depression that followed the elation of my dismissal I had decided to be a better girl, and bought most of Tennyson, bound in one volume, to read in the train. Now I hate poetry. I suppose it's crude of me, but I feel that to write poetry is just a way of getting oneself misunderstood in a complicated manner. But everybody says one ought to read poetry, and everywhere I have ever been I have found volumes of poetry, mostly uncut and some with dusty tops. Well, that was my first and my last serious attempt to read poetry, for Doctor Upnor picked up the book, and his dark eyes fixed on me his sideways, ironical look. "Oh! oh!" he said, "so we're going back to Hampshire to hear 'the mellow ouzel fluting in the elm.' We're going to derive broad courage and splendid faith from the rhythmic teacher who tells us that there are 'So many worlds, so much to do, so little done, such things to be.'"

"Don't laugh at me," I said. "One ought to read poetry."

He laughed. "You know, Miss Trent, I didn't expect you to succumb to superstition. Poetry is only a superstition. A sort of degraded music. Oh, I know you and lovely lines here and there, and I would gladly say to you:

"'Bid me to live and I will live, thy Protestant to be . . .'

though I suppose it would be more appropriate in our circumstances to quote Jung Werner and say: 'May God protect thee! 'Twould have been too sweet.' But all the same, everything that is said in poetry can be said in prose more easily and more completely. The fact remains that if you want a rhyme to 'cat,' it must be something like mat, or pat, or rat. Now rat happens to fit, and all is well in that case. But imagine the wretched situation of a poet with his cat hero in a barn where there are no rats, but only mice. He would have to torture, to mangle his line so as to end: 'A mouse, not rat.' In other words he would have to drag in the wretched rat."

"But the melodious sound!" I said, feebly.

"If you want melody, buy a penny whistle. And, anyhow, if all you want is melody, why bother about the sense at all? Why not juxtapose words that sound well, such as purple, primula, Endymion? There's quite a nice line for you: 'Endymion's purple primula.' Doesn't mean anything, but sounds well. That's why it's poetry. Miss Trent, let me give you that opinion of poetry as a keepsake, since you're leaving the world—I mean returning to your family. Don't be taken in. Neither by political traditions, nor by class habits, nor by the worship of Latin or Greek or poetry or the musical glasses. There is only one test, whether of a thing or of a man—Do I like it? Don't ask yourself whether you ought to like it. If you don't like it, it isn't good for you. A dog will not eat powdered glass, because instinct tells him it is not a nice diet. Well, trust your instinct. Sniff that powdered glass carefully, every variety of it you may meet. Fear no experience. But please don't go farther in experience which you are not really drawn to." He held

my hand for a moment. "Good-by. I don't suppose I shall see you again unless you want me to."

I did not reply for a moment, but freed my hand, for I was rather afraid he was going to kiss me. I didn't mind the idea, but it made me nervous, because I didn't know how I stood with him. So I just said: "Oh, I shall be doing something else. I expect we'll come across each other."

I gave Tennyson to Nurse Garthorpe. She was a serious woman, and I expect she forced herself to read it. I was beginning to develop into a woman since I was getting subtle in revenge.

Chapter IV

Heritors

I

IT isn't easy to live at home. If I have daughters and they grow up, I shall turn them out at twenty with a check and a blessing. Perhaps then they'll just mob my front door. When I think of the many girls I have met, on the stage, in manicure shops, on the streets, and that nearly all of them have simply bolted from home, from what is called a good home (so called I suspect, because a good home is an ideal and therefore doesn't exist), I come to believe that the young should at a certain time be separated from the old and placed in severely classified internment camps. After all, home is an internment camp; all one can do seems to be to make another camp, with oneself as commandant. But the prisoners worry one.

I think I was rather a worry to mamma. Before the war I was a worry because I had to be amused and, if possible, married. I had to be provided with horses, which mamma always felt weren't reliable. I had to have frocks ordered for me, which meant going to town with mamma, who hates railway journeys; I had to have parties given for me, though mamma cares for the society of hardly anyone save Aunt Augusta. I remember the pucker between her eyebrows when one of my parties had to be given and it was suddenly discovered that the parlor maids had secretly broken most of the glass. That concerned the housekeeper, but at heart mamma was the housekeeper. She liked it. Housekeeping irritated her, but still she liked it, as a saint rejoicing in his hair shirt. Still she did it all, brave mamma, with her pretty brown eyes, her soft gray hair, her sweet, faintly silly con-

versation. I wouldn't have had her otherwise. She did her bit properly. (How horrified she would be if she could hear me saying of her anything so dreadful as "she did her bit.") She got Isabel married and me engaged.

Poor mamma! She was a casualty in a way. She didn't expect her younger daughter to come back from hospital to tell her to *strafe* a servant, or to remark that there were "umpteen" pheasants in the covert ready for shooting. Mamma recovered a daughter who smoked gaspers and crossed her legs. Mamma heard her daughter say "damn." I expect poor mamma would have put that right by degrees, as refining influences blotted out the barbed-wire entanglements erected by the war on my personality; even though papa gave her no help. I read somewhere that a Frenchman said that in the heart of every man lies a sleeping pig. Papa's animal is different, it's more like a sleeping dog, a rakish sort of fox terrier who roves the streets seeking adventures. If papa hadn't been so rich he'd have gone into the world and been a nut, like Uncle Victor. So papa said, "Really, Ursula, I don't know what you girls are coming to," and gave me a cigarette. He thought me rather fun; he went about hoping that I wasn't flirting, and conveying that he had an open mind if I wanted to confess.

But he, too, was to have his troubles. I feel very ungrateful when I think of it, but I couldn't stand being suspended like this at Burleigh Abbas. Burleigh Abbas! What a name. Like Horsted Keynes, or Whitechurch Canonicorum. Could anything possibly happen in places called like that? You see, in the hospital, the men had told me a good deal about places like Bradford and Wigan. They sounded like real places. I gathered that there was no room in Wigan for whales to do any heaving, that in Wigan the whale would at once be boiled for its blubber. I had a vision, through the halting speech of these northerners, of massed gray streets, sooty pavements, tall smokestacks, inky cranes, outlined against a sky almost as black. A panorama that shook as industry made things, trepidated with machinery, and scarred the country with spreading heaps of glittering slag. Now I

was at Burleigh Abbas. It may seem strange, but the thing that drove me out again was no fever of agitation; it was a joke. There is always a joke going round in a country house, generally a silly one. It is used several times a day for about a week. Later, it crops up again at growing intervals. For in country houses very little happens, so jokes are spread out. In this case, we had a man staying for the week-end, a certain Captain Stanhope. The night he arrived, most of the west wing was flooded, including its bathroom. So he had to use the bathroom attached to my bedroom. (Bathrooms had forced their way into Ciber Court, and we had only two on that floor.) Of course I hurried on the Sunday morning, but he didn't, and as in my haste I had left my toothbrush in the bathroom, I didn't know what to do. I listened to him splashing for some time; when he came out, and devoted what seemed endless days of drying himself, I could bear it no more, and, gently opening the door, I put in my hand and asked for my toothbrush, which he gave me. But at breakfast he let out the mild incident. The whole of that week-end was filled with humorous allusions to the intimate relations existing between us; we were sharing a bathroom. Was it compromising for a young man and a young woman to share a bathroom if they did not share it simultaneously? Did he brush my teeth for me? After laughing four times or so, I got maddened; on the Tuesday night I was rude to papa when at dinner he asked who would next week-end share Ursula's bathroom.

So I went to Basingalton, where a little old man who had failed as a music master taught shorthand and typewriting in a dusty, copying office. Oh, how I hate shorthand! It's so easy to do, and so illegible when you've done it. And typing! I thought it would take me years to learn not to put "thr" for "the." As for inserting a new ribbon! One wants motor gloves and a mackintosh. I practiced on a hired machine at home, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party," to get my speed up. Papa said it sounded worse than the piano. So, at the end of three months, I was very bad, and was at once engaged at

the Food Control Office at Basingalton. I arranged this without too much difficulty; papa and mamma felt a little disgraced by the venture, which was quite different from my Florence Nightingaling, but they were hampered by their period—girls were doing these things.

So I became a servant of the state. How splendid that sounds until you start filing. The Food Control Office at Basingalton was located in a warehouse attached to Basingalton Town Hall, which had been divided into small rooms by an immense number of matchboard partitions. My attention was drawn to this conformation of the building by seeing my chief, Mr. Knowle, turn an almost obviously attentive ear toward the conversation which was being conducted on the other side. This did not surprise me in Mr. Knowle. I had never met anyone quite like him before. He had, I think, been departmental manager in a big London dairy, and somehow he had been made director of Section B in the Basingalton Food Control. We dealt with cheese, butter, milk, and all dairy offals. It was not dull. Farmers came in furious and went out fuddled. I confess that I myself took an occasional malignant delight in making a large perspiring man fill in several colored forms. When he asked why we hadn't answered his month-old letter, I crushed him by giving him a new green form and telling him that if he would rewrite his statement on that form, we would attribute to it its proper reference number, and I could assure him all would be well. Mr. Knowle was very remarkable. He was a long, thin man, sheltered by long, thin, gray hair; a reddish-yellow nose, rather like an undeveloped Swede, gave through its turn-up an air of mean ferocity to his countenance. The remarkable nose, the broken teeth, the furtive, sharp eye, gave one the impression of a ratlike meanness. A rat with a touch of peacock. (The maximum of cross breeding.) I became his shorthand typist. He sat behind his desk, cleaning his angular finger nails with a pocket knife. That was a characteristic; to the end of our acquaintance we seldom conversed free from this ceremonial, but the deeper Mr. Knowle dug, the dirtier his nails got. "Yes," he said,

"I think you'll do." He tittered: "But you'll have to pay strict attention to business, look! For you young ladies" (titter), "you only think about dances, eh? and parties, eh? Well now, shall we make a start, look? We've no time to waste when the country's in danger, look!" (Welsh? Or is it: Look you?) He dictated. We began with a letter to a farmer, who complained of the nonreturn of his churns. At a certain sentence Mr. Knowle broke off.

". . . and though the Minister cannot commit himself to the statement that the churns have been delayed by or owing to action taken by officials under his control, he is nevertheless aware that irresponsible action taken by officials not so employed might lead the aforesaid officials to condone what might be described as an irregular *status quo*."

Mr. Knowle threw himself back in his armchair and combined his incredible finger nails. "There, Miss Trent," he said, "is a model official letter, look." He winked at me vigorously. "Never commit yourself, Miss Trent, eh?" I smiled dutifully. He smiled back. We were getting on.

At first Mr. Knowle irritated me. He was always "wangling," as he called it; it maddened me that, whenever he telephoned, he had to display for my impressment his peacock-rat personality. I can hear him: "Ah! ha! That would be telling you too much." (Wink, wink, sideways smile at me.) "But don't you think the proposal should come from you?" (Shrug of left shoulder and wily gesture with eyebrow.) The conversation then ends: "Well, well, suppose you come and see me, look? and we can talk." (He throws himself back in his armchair and yells with laughter.) Then, in a penetrating tone, to me, "He'll only get it verbally, look!"

Then I grew amused and sat down to the comedy of Mr. Knowle. He was rather disgusting, I suppose; when he wasn't bragging he was making a fuss. I had to go with him one afternoon in the car to Reading, not that he wanted me, but because the director of Section B must have his secretary in attendance. No doubt he would have liked to tell

me how he had started an office boy at fourteen and ended as director of Section B, but the local A. S. C. depot had sent us an old car on which they were trying a new girl. We passed a little time with a wheel in a ditch, during which it rained with beautiful steadiness, while Mr. Knowle ran from side to side, yelping, offering no help to the girl. Fortunately she expected the accident, for she had brought a jack and stolidly levered up the axle, while Mr. Knowle yapped about the danger, and the damage done to national interests by his delay in reaching Reading. Also about the indignity offered to the director of Section B. When at last we started again he resumed the conversation on danger, delay, and dignity. These topics employed also a great deal of time at the Reading Central Office; in an attenuated form they pervaded the office for the next two or three days.

Yet he was enjoying himself very much. He had had more people under him than he had now, but it had been private service, while now, as he always put it, he was under the Crown. Whether "under" was what he meant I am not quite sure. Also he was very busy, for he was one of those men who have lost all taste for anything but work. He had worked so hard that on Sundays he could think of nothing else to do than invade a sleepy depot and ask the watchman, who didn't know, to see "that everything was all right on the Monday morning, look." He liked work for work's sake; he found a sort of abstract good in the twelve-hour day, and made us do it so far as he could. We lost Miss Moss like that, because she wanted a day off to get married. Mr. Knowle said that in war time there was no time to get married, except the lunch hour. He had more sense of the value of time than of the value of labor. I mean, to him everybody was a "hand"; if you paid somebody tenpence an hour you had to have your hour. The work done in that hour interested him, but interested him less. Sometimes he had the mood of the paternal employer, when he would tell me that I looked wonky, and must remember that *mens sana in corpo sanorum* (which doesn't sound quite right). Then he would tell me that he liked riding, and talk of the

magnates he had met. He told me I ought to read Stevenson because it was so well written. He forbade me to read Elinor Glyn, and said there was nobody like Thackeray nowadays.

What interested me most, when at last I discovered it, was the inner life of a government office. I did not at once find out that the natural enemy of Section B was Section A. It was Miss Probus who explained the mechanism. She was one of the clerks; she always wore a dirty lace blouse and a blue bow round her neck. She was about forty, and looked as if she had never been less. She had a sniff like a razor blade. But I got on with her because she was so nasty that I felt that she must be unhappy. One would be, with a blue bow round one's neck. Miss Probus knew offices; she'd spent over twenty years in them, and once, when I vaguely wondered why Mr. Knowle was always running into the Director-General's office, Miss Probus leaped at me like a lucid but disagreeable cat.

"How can you be so silly?" she asked. "All these sections think the other sections unnecessary. Haven't you heard old Knowle say that it's no use his dealing with one article of diet, like dairy produce, if he can't cope with the farmers who are producing fatted stock for killing instead of going in for milk?"

"Yes," I said, "but I don't understand."

Miss Probus absolutely sibilated her next sniff: "Oh, I've no patience with you! Don't you see that he wants to amalgamate Section B with Section A? The director of Section A could be got rid of by promotion or something; then when A and B are combined under B he'll have such a big section that the Director-General will see for himself that it's absurd to keep on a little section like C for potatoes and roots. Mr. Knowle 'll get them all three. Then he'll start going to Reading and developing general interests in the County Control, while the Director-General wastes his time over letters and work and all that; then there will be a rearrangement. Mr. Knowle will be Director-General. Then he'll go to London and see the Minister, and so on.

Unless," and a flush of hate rose in the suet of Miss Probus's cheeks, "unless A knifes him first, or C knifes them both. That's government, Miss Trent. Knife or be knifed, or, more politely, for the public, 'Official Co-operation.'"

II

It was funny to leave this and go home every night, with papa preserving an atmosphere of official secrecy and fending off innocent questions as to the milk supply. "But, Ursula, no, I mustn't ask you these things. Official secrets, and all that." When I described Mr. Knowle to mamma, she was quite shocked. "I'm sure we all have our crotchets, Ursula, but you shouldn't talk about him like that. Not in war time." I was very bored. Nothing was happening except that Doctor Upnor met me on a Saturday afternoon in Colby Wood. He had come over from Woking, and we had a very long talk. It wasn't exactly a lovers' talk, and therefore I forget most of it. It is so difficult to hang on to details when a man discourses about classical education, especially when one feels that he hates it because he hasn't had it. I'm being unjust. I did Latin at Eastbourne and don't remember a word of it, while Doctor Upnor had read his Plutarch and his Tacitus in translations. But I remember his rage against Aristophanes. "Greek drama!" he growled, his dark eyes savage. "It makes me ill to think of the stuff that's being poured into the youth of this country. Fortunately, youth is a sieve. Greek! another superstition. I was reading 'The Birds' last night. Heavens! what silly rhetorical stuff! Can you believe that we make young men read this rot about birds setting up a blockade between man and the gods!"

"But isn't it beautiful language?" I protested. (Some tradition said it for me.)

"Oh, beautiful language!" he cried, impatiently. "Language means something, and most Greek literature has ceased to mean anything to us who don't believe in the gods. There's not one idea, not one scrap of wit in that play of

Aristophanes'; yet we've embalmed it for the amazement of the future. And a dear friend of mine, who was born to the stuff, I suppose, urges me to consider the topical allusions to corrupt officials, dandies, and fashionable poets of the period. Topical allusions! three thousand years old! Am I going mad, or is mankind like this? Will some Oxford don in the thirtieth century dig up 'Buzz, Buzz,' or whatever it is, and ask wretched youths to laugh at Mr. Leslie Henson's allusions to Mr. Churchill's hats? Yet that's what it comes to, except that we're a jolly sight more witty than was Aristophanes, and that a page of Anatole France knocks the whole of Juvenal into a cocked hat. The world is crazy. Its education is in the hands of witch doctors, of medicine men. Oxford dons would be popular in Central Africa. They shut themselves up in a dream where the mind of Cincinnatus is more interesting than that of Lloyd George, and where Leander is made out to be a greater athlete than Carpentier. Mad! mad!"

Perhaps because this seemed to upset him so, we came a little nearer to being lovers. He pleased me, this rough and aggressive young man. I wasn't used to his sort, so I responded when he suddenly slipped his hand through my arm and whispered:

"You aren't like that . . . Ursula. You aren't tied up. At least you're escaping, aren't you?"

"I don't understand," I said, though I half knew what he meant. "It's so difficult to understand men. They use long words and they think things clearly. I can't do that; I just feel that a thing is or is not, but I don't know why."

"Oh yes, you do understand," he said, as he caressed my hand. "You understand that you're in a world petrified by rules and excitements, and false ideas, a world which puts love on license. Like regulated vice on the Continent . . . except that the license isn't transferable. But damn education. You're very beautiful, slim like one of those birch trees." We stopped for a moment. He gazed at me. "I wish I dared to love you," he said, "but I'd love you too much."

I did not reply. He was married. His shadowy, unknown wife made me feel guilty. Yet I thought I wanted him to love me, because he interested me. Nearly all men say such dull things; they ask you if you've seen So-and-so in the play of the day, or whether you prefer the country to the sea. Then they relate their own experiences in the country and talk about themselves. Doctor Upnor talked about things in general, the only things I really like men to talk about, unless it's about me. I think that by stirring my intellect he stirred my emotions, for I did not resist when he kissed me; I liked it. To this day I don't quite know what pleasure I have found in so many caresses. The temporary touch of lips? The strange softening that goes through one then, and for a while clings to one's being, like scent that time slowly dispels? Or the suggestion in the kiss of the sensual world it fringes, which one may not enter, yet which one gladly borders? Or the tribute of the man's desire? a desire so cheap and continually addressed to so many other lips? Or just the slavery to one's own unconscious impulse, which is eased by a kiss because in it one gives a little? Or just curiosity? One wonders what the contact with that clipped mustache, that shaven lip, that heavy beard, can actually be like. Will it carry a new scent? Gasper or Egyptian? Or is it triumph? Is it the secret desire to see those dark eyes, blue eyes, cloud with pleasure, shine with greed, or slowly, rapturously half close? Satisfaction or sense of power? Conquest or conqueror?

I don't know. I suppose men and women take these things differently, but men's caresses are often unsatisfactory; they always seem to want to press them to a conclusion, from which we always shrink. We are soothed by what stimulates them. We always say with Faust to the fleeting moment, "Tarry yet, thou art so beautiful," while men always want the next moment, the last moment, want it at once. So we flee because man clothes our dream of mist in the leaden garment of reality. We flee? Do we flee? Do we not flee as a nymph from a satyr, laughing, and looking over our shoulder as we run, so that we may not outstrip him too much?

III

There is no such thing as a linen coat and skirt that fits properly. I was having a lot of trouble just then with a butcher-blue suit faced with white piqué. The dressmaker at Reading had begun by making the piqué facings too short, so that the lapels were dragged into strange undulations. This was remedied, but the piqué, having been left untouched, developed along its length a series of puckers. Furiously, I took it away and wore it, and, having unknowingly sat on a damp seat in the garden, the coat grew covered with zigzag wrinkles. Finally the skirt began to sag and ended an inch longer at the back than at the front. I tried to tell papa why I was so angry, but he only laughed and said that war workers must not be coquettish. Men call us mysterious, but their lack of interest in certain things amazes me.

For instance, there was the fuss about my trousers. A fancy-dress dance had been arranged at Alton to collect funds for the Red Cross. It was really very nice, with a jazz band from St. Dunstan's. The county really enjoyed itself—at least, the soldier portion, because it was able to wear masks and, thus sheltered, to talk to pretty tradesmen's daughters whom so far they had gazed at only covertly. Sir Fitzwater Ingham was splendid as Don Quixote. Verena came as Columbine; Claribel was a gypsy, which she thought an original note. The town made wonderful things out of curtains, chair covers, gilt cardboard, and called itself Harlequins, Italian brigands, pierrettes. I wanted to come as a harem favorite, in a loose, sleeveless coat of red velvet, gold-braided at the edges, over a white crêpe-de-Chine shirt, with a green sash, lots of sequins, and pink trousers. When the clothes arrived mamma merely said, "Ursula, you aren't going to wear that!"

"Why not?"

"But, my dear . . . really . . . *trousers!*"

"There's nothing indecent in trousers, is there? They clothe one, in fact, considerably."

Mamma evaded me. She always did. "Oh no, no! It really wouldn't do. People wouldn't like it."

We had a long, rambling discussion, during which I first tried to find out why people would mind. I at last managed to discover that mamma didn't mind my trousers, and that she was sure that Lady Edderton didn't mind my trousers. Probably nobody did separately, but put together they would. Then I tried to tear out of mamma the reason for which she would mind their minding. But that was impossible; mamma wasn't used to having things torn from her. Finally I went as a ballet dancer, with bare arms, very little front, hardly more back, and showing four inches of leg above the knee. Everybody was delighted, and an idiotic young man at arms dragged me down with him and put his spurs through my skirt, which cost four pounds, after an awful haggle for six guineas. As I had spent all my dress allowance, papa paid, remarking that it was worth four pounds to keep me out of trousers.

It was these small irritations, I suppose, that made me more critical of my surroundings. I don't know how I became critical. Papa wasn't, mamma wasn't; Isabel was too busy enjoying herself. Being married, I suppose, they didn't get shaken by the war, didn't get into touch with people they hadn't met before, like Mr. Knowle and Miss Probus. And they never met people like Doctor Upnor; the clever ones in their set had the common decency to keep their ideas dark. But I had to criticize, and really the things that were happening in the country in 1918 were peculiar. The profiteers were arriving. The little ones were buying laborers' cottages, which they painted, filled with imitation old furniture, or maple suites; the larger ones were buying big villas, which the ruined stockbrokers were selling. The richest, who'd been in the country a little longer, such as the Mossats, the Sedberghs, the Wardles, were occupying what had been the dower houses, or even the seats of people like Lady Denshaw or Colonel Risby. They were fitting themselves

into the county, rather in the way, I suspect, that a conqueror arrives in the East. When the massacre is over he begins to fling handfuls of gold to the populace.

IV

Extraordinary people! What do they do it for? People like Sir Isaac Mossat, who'd just got his knighthood. It seemed so extraordinary to see this short, fat, swarthy man, of whom Lady Denshaw said that he was as black as a new knight, in the inconvenient, tumble-down house of old Lady Ellwood, who couldn't keep it up, so was retiring to Tunbridge Wells. He wasn't a bad man. Really, he was a nice man, keeping up convalescent homes for his staff (he was a cinema proprietor), paying for the education of all sorts of boys and girls belonging to his doorkeepers and clerks, shedding a rain of flowers, woolen things, and coal on the old cottagers attached to Ellwood Place. But he was—how shall I put it—in a sort of toy shop. I stayed there once for two or three days, at the invitation of his daughter Judith, and I talked to him. It seemed queer that a new-rich should be so keen on the Church, the King, the classes, keen on all the established ideas, the value of sport, the sanctity of marriage, the improving quality of books of travel and memoirs. I don't know how he could have got on if he tried to be so like everybody else. Perhaps he was different inside. Perhaps it was this toy-shop feeling, this immense desire of his for first editions, numerous telephones, super-bathrooms, collected editions, motor cars, big gardens. He made Ellwood Place shocking . . . like an old lady in pink. Every room had Bradshaw, A.B.C., Clerical Directory, Racing Calendar, and lots more, bound in vellum, with the Mossat arms embossed in gold. He put a Louis XV brass doorhandle on the priceless Tudor oak hall door. A telephone stood in the inglenook. He was very happy. He talked to me about colonial push, and the premium there'd be on seats to see Haldane hanged. Also, he made me understand a little what the cinema meant:

"You know, Miss Trent, you've got to fetch the people somehow. Got to find out the things they'd like to have different in their lives. Well, they can't get 'em, but I can show 'em to 'em on the film for fourpence. All those people driving a quill at a desk, or washing the linen, they want a bit of color. Bit of excitement, you know. They want to get away from life, which ain't surprising, considering. Oh, I know you're one of those who look down on the film. You don't know what it's going to do. Why, we've only started! We can do things on the film that the stage can't even think of. Can Drury Lane show you a motor car falling over a precipice? No. Can Drury Lane bring on two thousand people at a time? No. Can Drury Lane pay its leading lady a hundred thousand pounds a year, like Mary Pickford? No. Ah! they make me tired, the people who talk about the new drama. The film's the new drama. It's ordinary life, the real thing."

There was something in it; and I had to laugh when he taught me to register emotions. He was ashamed of everything in his origins, but was proud of his career. He loved the cinema, and he convulsed the table at dinner, the second night, by telling me loudly to register delight over a mushroom savory. Everybody took it up. Judith registered the gambler's greed at bridge, while Sam Mossat gave me a lot of trouble by registering the love emotion, not only publicly, but privately. The only person who didn't like it was an armyish stockbroker who wore tweeds rougher than the coat of a sheep dog, and had to tuck up his mustache to eat soup.

Extraordinary people. Extraordinary places. Not only the Mossats, but the others, the Sedberghs and such. I know now that they were not peculiar to my county, and that this sort is dotted all over the country from John o' Groat's to Land's End. Much the same. The surroundings are different. Sometimes, when Mr. Profit is a laird, rather self-conscious about his pink knees, he learns broad Scotch. Otherwise he picks up from his gardener some Somerset, which is later taken for Lancashire. Yet always the same

world, always the lodge, and the lodgekeeper, whose children soon find out that the new gentry like bobbing; always the same spreading compromise between a polished meadow and a rough lawn, round an oak tree, or a chestnut tree, bordering a private golf links. Always the road that is called the drive, yet is a mile long, through the interminable park which shuts off the great house.

Then the great house, often Georgian, sometimes Elizabethan or Tudor, even twentieth century, slightly masquerading, but essentially the same: gravel before the porch; in the hall some footmen in quiet livery, a glimpse of the butler in his day clothes; glass doors; the hall with a stone or parquet flooring, covered with thick red and green rugs. Generally dogs before the fireplace, Mrs. Profit's, I mean Lady Profit's peke, or an outside sheep dog. Or, more subtly, an Irish terrier, to show that this is the country and the rough life. In the outer hall, as many hats and caps as would fit out a hydra; other evidences of the country: dog whips, riding crops, leggings, snow-boots. Why not stilts? Profusion begins at the gate. Everything is provided; there is too much of it. When I think of the broken-down furniture in my old nursery at Ciber Court, of the filthy carpet in papa's study, which nobody has dared to raise since grandpapa died!

Then the dining room, generally too long, sometimes provided with family portraits by the previous occupants, or with fresh ones by the Royal Academy; generally Mr. Profit has fought a few battles at Christie's, bought a Raeburn, a Romney, or a Gainsborough. The little gold labels show this; unfortunately the price labels have had to be taken off. Then the drawing-room, always a little too high in a twentieth-century ancestral home, with a floor always too slippery, filled with too much furniture, because Mr. Profit has to buy something; loaded with too much Sèvres, too much Crown Derby, too much Queen Anne silver. We have some of that at Ciber Court, because the Trents have for centuries been giving and receiving wedding, birthday, and Christmas presents, but at home the silver doesn't

match. I suppose some time we had our apostle spoons in sets, but we've lost some, had some stolen, and been too slack to match them.

Not so in the house of Mr. Profit. They've bought Bond Street and the Boulevard des Italiens, and dumped it (complete with velvet cases) in the home counties. Their cigarettes! Oh dear! At Basingalton I carried them about in a yellow packet . . . but Mr. Sedbergh beamed at me when the footman staggered toward me with a cabinet containing, I think, thirty kinds of cigarettes, an international congress of cigarettes, tipped in cork, gold, silver, rose leaf . . . I don't know.

And the bedrooms! My bell at Ciber Court was generally broken. At the Sedberghs' one must move carefully lest one press a silver button by mistake. One wabbles on the velvety sea of their carpets; at least I do, who am used to a threadbare rug on boards that want staining. I thought I should never get out of bed in the morning, because the bed was curtained; when I tried to pull, I found there were four thicknesses of thin curtain, exquisitely graduating light. I got the four strings tied up with two bell ropes. I felt that if I touched anything people would rush in with morning tea and a gold bath. Must be a job living like that. Keeping it up, you know. The men must worry a lot, wearing the right Harris or Donegal tweeds that one sees in the shop windows in Bond Street. And getting knitted ties that really feel like nutmeg graters. And remembering never to button the belt of one's Norfolk. And seeming rough and awkward, suggesting too much shoulder and knee, because one's in the country and taking it easy.

But I did like the meals. At the Mossats' it was like living at Claridge's, for they'd given Claridge's *chef* a thousand pounds to come to them. It rather puzzled me to make up my mind when simultaneously offered champagne, claret, burgundy, whisky, hock, cider, lemonade, and barley water . . . but I got used to it. As one might get used to living at Whiteley's. Everything was there. If, by some extraordinary catastrophe, anything had been forgotten,

there was the telephone to the station, the private line to the office in London, the other private line to the town house in the London square; at the end of those wires, more butlers, more secretaries, more purchasing agencies, more people to fetch, to carry, to answer questions, to think out wishes if one was tired.

It made their families a little listless; they hadn't a chance to want; they had earned disappointment by shedding desire; by placing themselves beyond need, they ceased to need. That is why they worked so hard. Why, they enjoyed fetching and carrying their friends to the station, and using their chauffeur a good deal on Sunday. They liked that activity better than their large houses and their libraries, filled with unread, uncut, histories. (No wonder.) They were human.

"I like dogs," said Mr. Sedbergh, "but give me a bit of blood."

How funny he looked upon his horse! He wasn't exactly a centaur. He took me round the home farm.

"Nice little place," said Mr. Sedbergh, casually, jerking at his collar, which always caught his waistcoat. "These pigs . . . good pigs . . . spotted white. I've rather a fancy for spotted white. Better pig any day than middle white."

Indeed, they were lovely pigs; they were currycombed, I suspect, or dry cleaned. They looked so well off among the tile and enamel; all the animals were tame, as if people were always giving them biscuits and things. The cows were like the servants, waiting to be tipped.

The conversation was rather like our own, about the county, and the rest of the world, who's married who, or will; is Lady Dorothy the third daughter? will Mr. Hyphenated be sent to Canada because he drove his car through the tollgate? and how shabby Colonel Risby looks in his scarlets! and is the ground too hard, or too soft? and is there a chance of getting a badger in the spinney? and will Sir John be able to keep up The Towers, now that he's been let in over Canpacs?

But we talked of London, too, the new play, the opera, the

ballet, that traitor Smillie, the Riviera, and Rome. I believe the good Mr. Profits go to Rome when they die.

"Yes," said Mr. Wardle, "we always go abroad every year. It opens the mind, you know."

All the Wardles go abroad, not only to Deauville, Rome, and St. Moritz, but "off the beaten track," to Russia, Hungary, the East, and the colonies.

"Yes," said Mr. Wardle, "we were quite comfortable at the Grand at Bucharest, though for my part I prefer the Royal at Sydney."

I have a vision of the Wardles leaving the Ritz in Paris for the Ritz in Constantinople, eating the same dinner, wearing the same clothes, controlling the same servants, who speak the same international language, buying French clothes in Petrograd, Viennese shoes in Tangiers, and local curios made in Germany. Or like the laird in *Trilby*, pointing to a fresco that has stood for five centuries in a Spanish palace, and saying, "*Coopy! coopy le muir!*" Off goes the fresco to Grosvenor Square, to gaze across the room into the eyes of Phyllis Dare, silver-framed. The boys go to Eton, the girls ride. Mr. Profit eats less and less, except cachets expensively prescribed, and hides himself to smoke a cigar where Mrs. Profit won't find out. Experience? Or experiences?

V

I'm a country girl, born on the land, a Trent. So I feel that these people have settled upon the counties like vultures on a battlefield. They've got their claws into the flesh of the poor old Trents, that have been lying about, heaving. Oh, I've no sympathy with the Trents! To register or to heave, does it matter? Really, I can't bear these people; I hate them as I do my own. They have all the vices of the townsman and have not yet the virtues of the countryman. (Nor his vices.) They have all the power, yet not the responsibility. Though, bless him! Mr. Profit tries. He realizes that land makes responsibility. Within a month of

his arrival he tries to be a man of Kent, or a Shropshire lad. He gets quite patriotic about it. Has himself made D.L. and J.P., subscribes to the hunt, the hospital, and the church; he'd like to back the chapel, too, if he dared, just to be safe. He sits upon the bench, keeps up the level of local morality, and stands the church a new bell. Mrs. Profit visits all the cottages with armfuls of orchids, and makes it awfully hard for the vicar's wife, who comes along with bunches of larkspur. One of them, I know, has learned Welsh.

At the same time Mr. Profit patronizes the county because it is hard up, but he is not quite sure that it's not the thing to be hard up. It is annoying to feel that he can afford coronas and . . . the squire smokes a cracked pipe. The county makes him uncomfortable; it's so casual, so comfortable in its slatternly way, so damnably there. When Mr. Profit appears at the meet, in his new scarlets, on his expensive hunter, he is not quite sure whether he is really "coming it" over the squire on that raw, red brute of his that doesn't look as if it got enough oats; the squire doesn't seem to know that his saddle's frayed at the edges. The damnable fellow doesn't seem impressed by the shadow of Strathfieldsaye, doesn't seem to care a damn if the duke is coming or not. Mr. Profit tries to convey the same impression and, after a while, subsides, feeling shrill because they stare him in the eye with an air of interest. At last, in despair, he increases his subscription to the hunt; politely, it takes his money. His neighbors eat his dinners and don't seem to mind him. He gathers something vague: they're sticking him, all right. But they talk slang to him; they "feel rotten"; or are "bored stiff." This, as he puts it, makes him feel "cruelly at a disadvantage."

At last Mr. Profit lives it down, and leaves his g's at home when he comes down for the week-end; he works hard at being bluff and hearty. He finds out the names of plants in hedges, and some one tells him whether mangolds are consumed by cattle, or pheasants, or both. What eventually saves him is that he thinks like the county: that the lower

class should remain below, that they are improvident, thriftless, drunken; that colliers make a hundred a week; that Socialism is sharing out; that tariff reform will save the country; that emigration should be discouraged because it is costing us our best; that education is bunkum, and that it is a mistake to teach girls anything but domestic service; that it is a shame workinggirls should buy sham pearl necklaces; that religion had better be let alone, trade-unions done away with; briefly, the lower classes are scum and must be kept in their place.

As soon as Mr. Profit achieves this community of ideas he discovers that the squire is on excellent terms with all sorts of laborers and shepherds, that he converses with them in the fields as if he liked them; then he goes crazy with trying to understand.

VI

But I am tired of poor Mr. Profit, though his irruption into Hampshire was amusing. I forsook him. A little before the armistice, as I left the Food Control to walk to the station, a man stopped me and begged. I was going to pass on, because it was raining, and one can never find one's money when it's wet. Then I saw that he wore a silver badge. This horrified me.

"No, miss, I've got no pension," he said. "I was discharged long ago for consumption; they said I'd got it before."

"Had you?"

"Not that I know of, miss. I got a job in the country first, easy enough. But such lots of men have been coming back. And I can't do enough work. I was a clerk before the war. I can't get a job in an office because I've got to have the window open. It would have to be a superior job with a room to myself." He laughed. "Not much chance of that, miss."

I thought for a moment, took his address. He was a shorthand typist and had other qualifications. Next day I

went to Mr. Knowle: "I'm going to resign, Mr. Knowle," I said, "and I want you to take in my stead a disabled soldier with consumption. He can have my small room and have the window open."

"What's this? What's this?" said Mr. Knowle, agitated, and practicing profound excavations under his finger nails. I explained.

"But, my dear young lady, I can't have you telling your director what to do, look. Resign if you like. The war's over."

"But food control will go on for a long time," I said.

"Oh! How do you know? Still, that's no business of yours. You wouldn't like to be dismissed for impertinence, would you?"

"Dismiss me if you like, but you must take on this man."

"Must?"

"Yes, or refuse to give an open post to a qualified, disabled soldier."

After a long argument, Mr. Knowle understood that I would report him to "John Bull" if he refused; fuming, defying me, and at last drawing blood from his finger nails, Mr. Knowle promised to see the man. The soldier got the job and I went home. There was an awful scene when it came out. Papa laughed; mamma, for several weeks, asked me every day how I could have done anything so unfeminine.

Chapter V

The Obelisk

I

I HAD not taken it seriously at first. It had come to me in fragments of dinner-table conversation. I knew that papa was on the committee of the war memorial (of course he would be), and I just took it to be one of the local fusses (you see, I was changing already) when papa suggested a certain disunion in the committee, a struggle between the partisans of the obelisk and those of the Ionic cross. Then I forgot all about it. I had Mr. Knowle to think of. When mamma told me that they were so worried, that Mr. Bowden was much too old and in the hands of the wardens, and really ought to retire and give up the living to a younger man; when she went on to say that Miss Nawton was making a ridiculous fuss about the war memorial—I just said: "Oh, is that so, mamma? Do you think my heather-mixture tweed will do this winter? or should I get a new one?" This excited mamma, and the conversation changed.

But one morning, as we came out of church, our group was accosted by Miss Nawton. We did not like her much, for she was a little old maid of about fifty, with an angular manner; above all, I resented her smell, a peculiar bitter-sweet, oil-of-clovey sort of smell, that is often exhaled by old maids, I don't know why. As if they had been laid up in a rather sour kind of lavender. An almondy smell. But never mind. Yet we had to be civil to her because the Nawtons had been in the county as long as we had; also there was nothing against her except that she was the local rationalist. She was the sort of old maid that goes in for common sense and plain speaking. Briefly, she was disagreeable.

Having picked me out, she began to converse about the weather, the evil results of the government's pasture-breaking policy; I thought that I was merely going to be bored, when I discovered that Miss Nawton was gradually walking more slowly; we were lagging. Already ten yards separated us from my father and mother. Then Miss Nawton murmured: "Miss Trent, I wonder whether you'd come and have tea with me one afternoon? There's lots of things I'd like to talk to you about."

"Oh," I said, awkwardly, "I'd be very pleased."

"What about Wednesday?"

"I'm afraid I may be going away . . ."

"Doesn't matter," said Miss Nawton. "After all, it's very simple. It's this war-memorial business. There's a lot of nonsense talked in this parish. You wouldn't believe it, but there's opposition to the obelisk, though, obviously, that's the right memorial. Any fool could see it. You can, can't you?"

I said nothing. It would be awkward for me if I said I couldn't see it.

"We can't agree about it. Mr. Bowden is perfectly useless. Of course, he's a clergyman, and I try to make allowances. But the poor old man is noxious as well as useless. He is absolutely in the hands of Mr. Felstead. As the people's warden, Mr. Felstead 'd do much better to look after the church roof and the tithes, and let religion alone. What's a churchwarden got to do with religion, I'd like to know? Anyhow, Mr. Felstead is egging on Mr. Bowden to have an Ionic cross. Perfectly ridiculous! And your father's just as bad."

I laughed. "Does papa want an Ionic cross?" I asked.

"He does. And he wants the obelisk too, in turns. Perfectly ridiculous!"

"And what do you want, Miss Nawton?"

"Oh dear!" she said, impatiently. "You ought to know that I hate all these emblems of superstition. Of course I want an obelisk." She paused, and I gathered that a delicate bit of canvassing would now take place. I was right, for Miss

Nawton said, "I want you to talk to your father and tell him not to be absurd."

"Oh, I say! I couldn't say that to papa."

"You can talk him round. Situation's perfectly intolerable. We've got a solid block of people who don't know what they're talking about, who are determined on a Christian symbol. And we can't get a decision because your father won't make up his mind. Christian symbol!" she repeated, bitterly. "I suggested catacombs." Miss Nawton went on to denounce Mr. Bowden, pickled in antiquated Anglicanism; the people's warden, a secret agnostic, but determined to thwart her; and finally made me promise to speak to my father. She ended by leaving us at the crossroads, vaguely remarking to poor papa: "Say what you like, Sir William, you won't get anybody about here to carve an Ionic cross right. You'll have to have it done outside the county, and that's that."

"Trying woman," said papa, after she left us. "She's always in earnest."

"Aren't you, papa . . . about the obelisk?" I asked.

"Ursula, I don't want to hear any more about the obelisk. I'm sick of the damned obelisk."

"But what are you? Ionian or obeliskian?"

"Oh, don't be absurd. We're all for the cross, only we don't want to vote down Miss Nawton. We feel that in a matter like this"—he grew rhetorical—"we ought to strive for a unanimous sense of . . . oh, a unanimous sense. And if the church feels that an Ionic cross is right, well, there you are."

"I rather fancy the obelisk, daddy," I replied. (I didn't care, but papa was so funny. He always got hot and irritated after Miss Nawton.)

"Indeed!" said papa, obstinately, as if that settled it. "You've got nothing to do with it. Are you on the committee by any chance?"

I said nothing more that morning, but I found that this had dragged me into the cross *versus* obelisk affair. Mr. Felstead waylaid me, having heard that Miss Nawton had

spoken. I had a letter from Mr. Bowden, hoping that there would be no strife. The cleavage deepened. Even papa, who wasn't exactly a democrat, said that all the village had told him that they wanted an Ionic cross. I told that to Miss Nawton, who at once went round with a little book, taking votes for and against the obelisk. I enjoyed myself frightfully, and late one night I got out and stuck a home-made poster on an outlying stable door:

UNDER WHICH OBELISK, BURLEIGH ABBAS?
SPEAK OR DIE.

Miss Nawton was furious, and issued a roneotyped manifesto to show that the obelisk was cheaper than the Ionic cross. Mr. Felstead replied by a public meeting, with lantern slides, on a trip to the western islands of Scotland, including pictures of dummy Christian fathers in Iona.

II

I told Doctor Upnor about it, and he didn't take it as well as I did. That was the day after Miss Nawton published in the Basingalton *Herald* a list of the supporters of the obelisk, headed: "Quality, Not Quantity. Mind, Not Muddle." She had the estate agent, Lady Penley, and Mr. Wardle. But the Ionic cross had Lady Edderton, the general shop, the post office, and the local sculptor, who had once led a sinful life, but now saw the light and hoped to carve the cross.

"Oh dear!" said Doctor Upnor. "I should laugh like you if this thing wasn't a microcosm of society, and if this village row wasn't exactly like the great international row. Hun or British, Ionic cross or obelisk! Honestly, if Miss Nawton could do it, wouldn't she kill Mr. Felstead?"

I laughed. "I believe she would. She'd think it her duty to her cause."

"Exactly. We have only one duty to our cause—to make it prevail. After that we can examine its merits. But don't let's talk of this village row; we haven't much time. Let's

sit down on this tree trunk. There's no moss on it to stain your frock. Look, the field's full of pink campion. Pink campion and rosy cheeks, they go on all the same under Ionic cross or under obelisk. You see, they know better." He took my hand and examined it carefully. "You have beautiful hands, Ursula. They taper like spear points." He bent down and kissed my hand where the fingers spring. It stirred me and made me uncomfortable, for I knew that next he would kiss me really.

"Don't," I said.

"Why not?"

"I oughtn't to meet you. What's the use? You're married. I wonder why I do it at all. I know it's wrong of me."

He smiled. I did not then understand how much this conversation must flatter him. It flattered him so much that he tried to draw me into his arms, but I resisted. I think I resisted him because he attracted me. I took a certain pleasure in this renunciation. "Don't," I said again. "I can't meet you if you do that. Why do you come? Aren't you happy with your wife?"

"Oh, I don't know." He sighed. "One falls in love. One marries. One pulls down a sort of safety curtain between oneself and the world, like in a theater. But if the stage catches, it burns all the same behind the safety curtain. You're right. I ought to let you alone. Oh, not from the moral point of view, but for your comfort. It's true I'm not happy. I've lost adventure." He stood up. "Look here, let me go while I have the strength to, and I'll learn to forget you."

Why did I do it? Was my pride outraged, or did I suddenly feel lonely and cast out? I couldn't bear to let him go like that, empty. I took his hand and, without knowing why, began to cry as I pressed it to my lips. Once again we ended in each other's arms, promising each other nothing, fearful of offering more, unable to offer less than aimless caresses. My tears had stained his cheek, and in a kiss I recovered some of their saltness.

III

I went to stay with Colonel Risby. I was fond of him, queer little old man. He never could express himself except through phrases such as "I mean to say," or "What I mean's this." His timid eyes, his drooping mustache, everything repelled clear expression. He'd taken to respecting me since I'd gone out into the world, as he called it; he wanted my opinion on Europe and on politics. Sometimes he summed up: "The world's changed in appearance, but not really. Of course, Labor's getting too much pay, but prices are going up. It's all the same, always will be." Then his mind would take a little leap. "The duchess is full of funny ideas. But she's no good, she's nobody. After all, she was only a banker's daughter. You can see it coming out in her daughter, Lady Dorothy. She's in with the wrong set, and they say she doesn't wash. At least, at Basingalton they call her Dirty Dolly." Pause. "There's a nice church." (We were walking by the Penley wall.) "See it? None of your modern messes. Pretty green, and good trees. Suppose they'll be building on it soon, the price of land being what it is. And the farming returns going down every day. Except the dairy farmers, of course. They can afford to pay four pounds ten an acre. No wonder everybody's laying land down to grass." He sighed. He was poor; taxes were going up; the newly rich worried him.

He was talking to the collie that followed us, old Chivvy, twisted-jointed, rheumy-eyed: "Come on, Chivvy. Come on, my man, my manikin. Come on, my old dog." He seemed so lost, this little old man, unchangeable in a changing world.

"Nice place, Penley Park. There's three hundred head of deer loose there. No wonder she can afford to subscribe two hundred pounds to the church fund. Plenty of rabbits here. Vermin, of course, but one must have something to feed the foxes. They caught a vixen the other day with a bag and a forked stick." Chivvy was lagging. "Come on,

old dog; come on, old manikin." He stopped, looked out sadly on the rolling prospect of the land. He seemed to feel the passage of time. "You know, I begin to think that things are changing, after all. They're breaking down the fences now to steal the wood. No more fences soon; only barbed wire. No more villages, I suppose, with all the young men going to the towns and the girls refusing to go into service. I don't know what they want. My father always got his gardeners for sixteen shillings a week and nothing much to do." Again he sighed, stroking the thin scalp of old Chivvy. "They've been shooting foxes this year. They'd have shot a man for doing that once upon a time. But now we're all equal, I suppose, and nobody touches his hat to anybody."

He was immensely desolate. It was like seeing something die. Mrs. Risby was not like that. She looked like an amiable brick—once handsome, now unpowdered. She was quite happy, going to church twice on Sundays and buying Longfellow calendars to give away at Christmas; collecting varieties of homemade jam, dabbling with anti-suffrage, her garden, the selection of hymns, the cares of the G.F.S., and the proper celebration of Empire Day. But Mrs. Risby was a Londoner, used to activity. Her terrible activity frightened her old husband, who still stood incredulously looking upon the landscape, as if he could see the smokestacks rising beyond the peaceful horizon.

IV

"Ursula," said mamma, "I want to talk to you. Of course, I know there's no harm in it."

I guessed. Of course mamma thought there was harm in it.

"Only I don't think it right that you should meet young men that you haven't brought to the house." As I said nothing she went on: "It's very silly of you, Ursula. You ought to know that you can't do anything in the country without being seen. I don't mean that makes any difference," she added, hurriedly, as she saw me smile, "but you've

got to set the example, and I can hardly believe it's true what they're saying in the village, that you've been seen with a strange young man in Colby Wood."

"Yes, it's true. His name's Doctor Upnor, from the hospital at Woking."

"Why hasn't he come to the house?"

"Because I want him for myself as my own friend."

"Girls of your age can't have men friends," said mamma, solemnly, "unless I know them too. Oh, I know it's modern to think that young men and young women can be friends. But it always ends in lovemaking."

"It does not," I replied, angrily, and stopped. Was mamma wrong? No. And she was clever enough to feel this:

"Well, if it hasn't begun it will begin. It's perfectly impossible for a young man and a young woman to be alone in a wood several times without lovemaking."

"Oh, mamma, don't be so old-fashioned! We've got lots of things in common—books, ideas."

"It always ends the same way," said mamma, "and it makes talk. Is he married?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Ursula!"

Then I surprised myself by my anger. "Yes, he's married. What difference does that make? You talk of a man being married as if he'd been chloroformed. Really, mamma"—as she did not reply I grew imprudent—"you seem to think that lovemaking, as you call it, is wrong."

"Has Doctor Upnor been making love to you?" asked mamma, with Victorian coarseness.

"I don't see why I shouldn't have the friends I like," I replied, evasively. "After all, there aren't so many men."

"But, Ursula," said mamma, in a shocked tone, "what does that matter? I don't understand you."

I lost my temper, not because mamma was lying to me; she wasn't, and that was the terrible part of it. She belonged to a period where nothing mattered to women except men, and she didn't know it. I belonged to a period where nothing mattered to women except men, but I did know it. I told

mamma that I was nearly twenty-five, that I wasn't going to be dictated to, and that all this was ridiculous. Papa came in and became very angry, by mamma's orders, I suppose.

"I hate this place and I hate this life and I hate everybody. And I'm not going to be shut up and wait and wait until one of the men who aren't killed takes pity on me. I want to go up to town."

They laughed at me. I had no plan in my head at all, but the heaviness of Ciber Court, like the misery of Colonel Risby, was driving me to action. I tried to make Isabel understand when she came for the week-end, my pretty sister Isabel, who's got a touch of red in her hair, like mine.

"I know," she said. "One feels like that. One wants some fun." She smiled covertly. "Of course, when one's married it's easier. You get married, Ursula, and then we'll see."

I had a sudden realization. Isabel had been married eight years, and at thirty, with her slim figure, her broad, dark face and sparkling eyes, was certainly the pretty Mrs. Osmaston. Gervers, her husband, hated dancing, hated the theater, loved electrical research.

"Such a pity Gervers is so stuffy," she said. "But there are others, when one's married, to give one a good time." I didn't say anything, and she added: "Don't be silly, Ursula. Don't put them all against you and talk of going to town to work. You won't have any fun if you're working; you won't have any frocks and you'll be too tired to brush your hair at night. Let me get you married. And then we'll see."

She was cautious, Isabel. I rather liked it. It was more amusing than confession. We grew more intimate during that visit, for I wired Doctor Upnor, and we had a secret meeting, followed by a note which showed that he was terrified by the rise of scandal, for suddenly he joined the merchant service and took a berth on a ship. It was a beautiful letter he sent me; men who don't love you always send you beautiful letters. He ended it with a hope that I wouldn't forget him. What brutes men are! Can't they

have the decency to hope we shall forget them? Oh, the masculine lust for possession! They'd like to think twenty years later that they'd left a barb in our hearts. Oh, how I hate them! And I'll never do without them quite. That's what I said to Isabel, who replied: "Anyhow, you're rid of that mess. Try not to get into another until you're married."

"Oh," I said, "you do harp on this marriage idea."

"That's the main thing for a woman. You've got to do everything regularly in this world: first your christening, then your vaccination, then your coming-out dance, then your marriage. After that?" and a pretty sideways smile illumined her dark features. "Well, after that . . . one can see. Marriage, you know, it's such an insurance. It's quite safe, really, if you spread your risk a little. Though the times are getting easier, now that dancing is so subtle that one has to have a dancing partner and that no other will do."

"Isabel," I said, "you're a little beast. And you don't even tell me enough to make me suspect you of . . . well, suspect you."

Isabel did not reply. To this day I'm not sure of her: she is prettier than ever, and has demonstrated to Gervers that he needed an experimental station at Harrow, where he often sleeps. One can't suspect Isabel.

V

Then things happened suddenly. It was as if I couldn't bear them any more. Women are supposed to bear things easily; they don't, but they're made to. Suddenly I asked papa for an allowance, as I wanted to go to town and work.

"My dear child," he replied, "these things aren't done unless you're going to do war work, and, by the look of things, the war 'll be over in a month or so."

"And shall I be over then?"

"I don't know what you mean. Things 'll start up again as they used to be."

"And I? Shall I start as I used to be, at the age of twenty-one? Will Oswald come to life again? No, it's no good

talking. There's a new time coming, and I don't want to miss it. Give me an allowance, papa, and let me go to town."

He did not reply for a time. We were in the study, and he was polishing his school cups. He was very proud of them, especially of the Sargent Athletic Cup, "won by W. R. Trent, 1874." There was also a cup for diving, 1878.

"Look here, Ursula," he said, "don't be silly. Isabel's married, and we can't let you go for a silly idea. I can't give you an allowance and let you go away on your own like this. Tell me, what *do* you want? The war's ending. There's going to be dances and lots of fun, and we'll go to town for the season, and all that. Don't be absurd."

I tried to bear it, when suddenly the struggle between the Ionians and the obeliskians developed gigantic local proportions. The Ionians won, having captured papa. On the following Sunday Mr. Bowden was foolish enough to refer to the obelisk as a heathen symbol; he said that a pagan symbol would not be erected in a district dedicated to Christianity for twelve hundred years. At that moment Miss Nawton rose in her pew and said: "I protest against the statement. You know nothing about it. And what you know about it is not true."

The congregation was first amazed by her presence in church, where she had never been before. Evidently she had hidden behind a pillar, but in a moment a hum of horror surrounded her departing presence, while Mr. Bowden practically burst into tears. I don't know why, but I began to giggle. Everybody was on his feet, murmuring, and I couldn't stop. I gritted my teeth together, but the internal convulsions were frightful. Suddenly something went inside me and I began to laugh aloud, louder, and louder. I think at the end I screamed and yelled; at last I collapsed in the churchyard, where papa had led me out, asking me all the time in the church what I meant by it, and, as soon as we got outside, what the devil I meant by it. At last I gasped:

"Papa, I can't stay here. Let me go to town."

He was furious: "You shall not go to town. Come home

when you feel better." He strode off, leaving me upon the tombstone.

It sounds funny. I can be hysterical again when I think of it. It wasn't funny, really, for this was the prelude to a quarrel lasting a fortnight, at the end of which I told papa quietly that I was going to town next day and that my life was my own. They relented in the morning, and offered me an allowance which I was brutal enough to refuse. I was nettled, so I wanted to feel heroic. What a little beast I was! When I think that if I have sons I shall be upset and angry if one of them wants to be a curate . . . yet I had no sympathy at all for my parents, in their horror before my rebellion. One doesn't understand. It is always too early or too late to understand. I didn't even think of them as the train rumbled out of Basingalton with my luggage, weighing very little, in the van.

PART II. THE BED SITTING ROOM

Chapter I

The Narrow, Narrow World

I

I WONDER how Dick Whittington felt when he reached the heights of Highgate to become Lord Mayor of London. I expect he was quite as nervous as I, and no doubt he was still worse off. For all he owned was a comforting cat: I had quite a lot of money; fifteen pounds in notes, amassed out of my pocket money, because I hadn't paid my bills; a twenty-five-pound war bond, which I had bought in the Selfridge draw on the chance of winning a prize; and thirty-four shillings in loose cash. Total, say, forty-two pounds; debts well over fifty pounds. For a moment I felt proud enough to pay these bills. It would be so fine, standing before the world, clear and shining. I stood debating this outside Waterloo and gazing at the Union Jack Club. Then I thought: "Well, papa has always paid my bills. These bills are for things I've had while I was living there. Therefore, if I'd stayed at home he'd have paid. After all, I haven't ordered any clothes since I arrived—namely, five minutes."

But suppose papa didn't pay? Oh, papa always paid. He was really very nice. I'd been a beast. There was a train back soon. But I remembered the obelisk. No, I couldn't go back to a place where they argued about obelisks and Ionic crosses, and supported bad jokes about mixed bathrooms. Still, papa mightn't pay, and the shopkeepers would suffer. I couldn't let that happen. But I owed over fifty pounds and hadn't got quite forty-two. I'd have to let somebody down. Would it be fair to pay some and let the others down?

Of course, I could sell my jewelry, but it wasn't much, only two gold bracelets, a rotten signet ring, and Oswald's ring, which I couldn't sell. A topaz and amethyst brooch, not worth much, and a pendant, pretty but not valuable.

Then I rebelled. After all, I'd a right to live. Strictly, it was my duty to live. Suicide was not allowed, not even by starvation. (I know better now.) Therefore, if I wasn't allowed to starve, it was my duty to hold on to my forty-two pounds. It wasn't much with which to face the world, though otherwise I wasn't badly equipped, for I had quite a good stock of clothes and a dressing case. The thing to do was to protect the nest egg and find some work quickly. As I stopped for a moment on Waterloo Bridge, where the gulls were volplaning and side-slipping, where a slight, dry east wind ruffled my hair, I looked for a moment at the prospect of the river. It made me rather nervous. This enormous stream, the piled hotels and public buildings opposite, the dim houses of Parliament in the west. This roaring city, these crowds, the throbbing of the bridge under the feet of the multitude. It made one understand what a leaf may feel in the wind. I was exhilarated and terrified by the idea of conflict. I was a stranger; for the first time in my life I had nowhere to go and no one belonging to me. I had, in a way, ripped myself away from the parent tree, and I felt sore at the portion of my being where we had parted.

Then I reacted and addressed myself: "Don't be silly. You've got everything, youth, health, some people say good looks, money to keep you a little while; you're a good shorthand typist, or more exactly a government shorthand typist. So don't be a fool. Your luggage is in the cloakroom and won't worry you. Go and get some lodgings, and remember that the girls in the Food Control at Basingalton seem to live quite comfortably on anything between thirty-seven and six and two pounds seven a week." That last remark of the energetic Ursula to the craven Ursula was unfortunate. Yes, the girls lived on about two pounds a week, but how did they do it? My felt traveling hat cost three pounds ten, and when I went round to Enos with

mamma to look at trousseaus, I hadn't seen a camisole fit to wear under four guineas. Food, too; last time I was up with papa we lunched at the Berkeley. Papa gave the waiter a pound note and got hardly anything back. Yet I'd only had lemonade. As I walked along the Embankment I therefore hesitated again, wondered whether I couldn't stand the obelisk, after all. But I was excited by this new sense of a plunge into the necessitous life. I then felt what now I know, that poverty is exciting, just as wealth is exciting, and that nothing is so detestable as a mediocre income. People of middle fortune can do nothing and must appear everything. Still, I was coward enough to wish I had four hundred a year.

When I began to visit furnished rooms, the desire for four hundred a year became still more pronounced. It was my fault, I suppose, for I had begun with romantic notions—I would live in the East End. Having asked my way, I ate a terribly expensive lunch at a place called Pimm's, and ultimately reached Aldgate. It was rather a jolly street, with lots of drays, buses, and barrows; for a moment I gloated before an eating house called "The Ten Ounce Chop," in the window of which steamed large trays of potatoes and greens cut into cubes. The sun was shining. A gay November day with a very light east wind. The flags of Armistice Day still fluttered. I looked into the mirror of a tobacconist and saw that the wind had brought color into my dark cheeks. I was pretty. It makes one feel safe, as if prettiness couldn't die. But I didn't stay in the East End. Ultimately I reached Bethnal Green Road; half terrified, followed by the inquisitive eyes of enormous matrons who absolutely eddied in their blouses, I visited a place called Satchwell Rents. With a sense of diving, I rapped the knocker at a house which advertised "Beds for Young Business Ladies." Oh, the dark passage, the staircase with broken and slightly greasy banisters, the second floor back room, the yard behind where were piled battered screens, part of a bicycle, the contents of several dust bins, broken bottles! On the wall, two skinny cats were preparing either for love or battle.

It was only four shillings, but I nearly ran away. I did not go so far at another house, for there, under scanty gray hair, the landlady exhibited a doubtful scalp. A third house, in another side street, was better. Everything had been repainted, and there was a bathroom. But stuck all over the bath was short reddish hair.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Oh, that's nothing," said the landlady, cheerfully. (She was very stout and affectionate.) "That's only some of ole Tim's hair, our collie, you know."

"But do you wash the collie in the bath?"

"Well, we has to wash 'im somewhere. And he's that big we haven't time to take enough pails of water to the yard."

I left the East End after my next experience. I had been hanging about irresolutely, when at a door appeared a very pretty young woman who looked faintly Japanese. She wore an ill-fastened skirt, a dirty chemise, and a short dressing jacket. She drew these garments together from time to time with a beautiful air of thinking of something else. Whenever she ceased to concentrate on them, it was clear that she was not ashamed of her figure, which was charming. After a moment she noticed me, and with a pleasant smile remarked: "Hullo, dearie! Had any luck this morning?"

"Luck?" I said. "What? How?"

She stared at me. "What are you doing here? Aren't at the earhole, are you?"

I decided not to betray my ignorance and replied, calmly: "No, I'm looking for rooms. You don't happen to know of any, do you?"

She did not reply for a moment, but examined me. Obviously she was pricing my clothes. "Rooms," she said, vaguely. "Aren't you a bit of a high-stepper to want rooms about here? Still," she added, consolingly, "we all has our ups and downs, don't we? Course we could put you up here if you're on the game."

One is not in vain for four years a nurse and a government clerk. One learns. So I was shocked rather than surprised

when a young man, obviously a foreigner, shouldered past her on the step, leered at me amiably, and remarked:

"Hullo, lovey! How did you find us out?" Then—and I did not at once resist, because I could not expect this—he stepped down, put an arm round my waist, and tickled me under the chin. I think I screamed, and I know that I ran down Bethnal Green Road, followed by a growing crowd of little boys who yelled, "Stop thief!" until I leaped into a tram. It took me westward, to the Bank. But this was not westward enough. I ran to the Tube; only at Marble Arch, where I got out to see familiar and inoffensive Park Lane, did I feel safe. No, the East End wouldn't do. It would have to be the West End. Not so near the Park; it would be too dear. Well, I might go near Regent's Park. It was characteristic of the Ursula of that period that she could naturally think only of living near a park. So I attained Marylebone; so did I visit all the afternoon, until it grew dark, houses where there were no rooms to let at all, houses where two rooms cost two pounds a week, luxurious houses, dirty houses, and one house where I was told that I mustn't bring gentlemen . . . an enraging suggestion. I at last found what I needed in Balcombe Street. It was very civilized, with Marylebone Road at one end and a chapel at the other. There is something secure about chapels and motor buses. Mrs. Witham, the landlady, was in no way cordial, but she showed no active dislike to me. The linoleum in the passage was waxed; the bathroom was accessible when "the gentlemen didn't want it," for Mrs. Witham was wholly a Victorian. The third floor front wasn't bad at all. At least, she called it the third floor front, but it was only half, for it had been divided by a partition. That was why I obtained this individual mansion, one bed, one table, one washstand, two chairs, a chenille hanging for the mantelpiece, four texts, and the *History of Scotland* that lay on the red-serge tablecloth, for eight shillings a week. At seven o'clock I was established. The contents of my dressing case and a few books and magazines made a big difference. The only thing that seemed funny was that Mrs. Witham had forgotten to

place a copper can of hot water, sheltered by a towel, into my washing basin.

II

So I began. I had real moments of kingship in Balcombe Street, such as letting myself in the first evening with my own latchkey, after another expensive meal at an Italian restaurant in Chapel Street, which was very good, but not so cheap as it seemed. Also waking up the next morning in the bed I paid for, able to ring for a breakfast I paid for. To pay for things is a great delight: one buys power as well as things. Still, I rose early. I felt that in London one must do something. The only question was what? That day I let the labor market alone, visited London that I knew not very well, especially the drapers' shops along Oxford Street, that mamma had never taken me to. They were more exciting than the parlors of Mount Street; I simply couldn't resist an umbrella of imitation malacca cane with a red-enamel top. It cost sixteen and six, but, after all, I'd left my umbrella at Ciber Court, and it was such a duck of an umbrella. That shop provided an excitement, for somehow I got up to the top, to the accounts department. At the back four or five girls were typing hard. I looked at them, half envious, half superior. I wished I had their job, and yet, with all this money in my pocket, I felt rather above them. Fortunately I was no fool, and, observing as I came back that a political meeting would be held that night at the town hall, I went in and took it down. Oh dear! this shorthand that men talk about so lightly. It was easy enough noting that hour of platitudes, but reading it . . . oh, dear! I was so bad at reading my notes that next day I decided not to bother about that side of it. After all, taking down letters was different; the thing was to get some work, and at once. When I remember my next thought I am ashamed. It was this: "I wonder whether I know anybody who could get me a job?" It didn't occur to me to try for myself; I didn't know how to do it; papa had got me into the hospital; Lady Halkyn

had got me into the Food Control. I supposed that somebody would now get me into something. I thought everything was done by patronage; I was an English aristocrat, and so I had the soul of a flunky. Perhaps aristocrats and flunkies have grown alike by associating for centuries.

So I tried. Because I was rather qualmy about my position, I went first to Lady Halkyn. She was a perfect darling, and cried when she saw me, because I made her think of Oswald. I cried, I don't know why. But there were anchovy sandwiches for tea, of which I ate a lot because I love them. Lady Halkyn was no use at all. She said she didn't know any people who had offices, and persisted in imploring me to come and live with her and be her companion, practically her daughter. Of course I couldn't explain, without being rude, that I'd given up being a daughter. At last she forced me to accept ten pounds and made me promise to come and see her often.

It was only when I went to Aunt Augusta that I remembered that Lady Halkyn had not said a word against my decision. I realized this because Aunt Augusta occupied an entire hour in roaring and bellowing about my disgraceful behavior:

"I can't understand how a girl like you, who's got all the opportunities for which other girls would give their eyes, can do a thing like this. You're putting yourself outside everything. What's that? Freedom? Stuff and nonsense! A girl doesn't want any freedom until she's married. That's her freedom. Oh, it's no good your talking" (I wasn't), "I don't know what's coming over you girls. Heaven knows! Girls always were difficult, but when I see you to-day with your sham curls and your painted mouths . . . don't interrupt, they are painted . . . I'm not surprised that this country should be infested with Socialism; and all those modern dances. . . . I was taken to a picture show the other day and told to admire a landscape that looked like a pattern of linoleum. Don't argue. Girls who argue are detestable; men hate 'em."

At last, very timidly, I sought her help.

"Don't expect anything from *me*. You're an unnatural daughter, an unnatural girl, and your conduct is perfectly disgraceful. How do you think your family 'll like it when you're selling matches on the pavement?" Aunt Augusta then dealt with night clubs, suggested that I was leading a loose life, and I went away.

Monica was almost as bad. I was rather fond of her. We had been at Eastbourne together; she was small, very fair, and quite pretty. I hoped a great deal of Monica, because her father was a rich stockbroker.

"Oh, Ursula," she said, "I couldn't ask father! You see, he hates the idea of girls in offices. Of course I know it's old-fashioned of him, but he says that woman's sphere is the home."

"I thought all that rot had gone with the war," I replied, rather rudely.

"So did I," said Monica, piteously. "It did go with the war, I think, but it's come back."

At last I saw that Monica's father would do nothing for me except give me an introduction to a lunatic asylum, so I accepted her invitation to go out to lunch and on to the Palladium. After all, she'd pay for lunch. I was getting mercenary, and no wonder, since my food at restaurants was somehow costing me eight or nine shillings a day. It was about then that I discovered that a fire in a grate can do more than look pretty. Very quietly, rather ashamed, I brought in a frying pan, on which I cooked sausages and made a strange scramble out of farmhouse eggs. Other eggs seemed very dear; also I invented a lovely dish: bread fried in dripping with a lot of salt. It was rather fun, picnicking. Except that I got a cold out of it, because I opened my door and window late at night to dispel the smell of cooking. I couldn't bear that Mrs. Witham should know.

Chapter II

Farewell to Plutus

A SORT of guilt and a sort of shyness at first prevented me from going to see Isabel. If I'd still been her sister from the country, yes. We'd have talked of the old rocking-horse. But Isabel married—Isabel with a house in Cadogan Square, as slangy as me, but talking a different slang, smart slang rather than war worker's slang, good-looking, though crude where I am delicate, and with a sidelong glance when she talks to men . . . well, was she Isabel? Or was she not rather a stranger, Mrs. Osmaston?

Shyness, no doubt. For she was still rich, and I no longer. But at last it struck me that I was afraid of Isabel, which proved to me that I must face her. My beastly old tradition, I suppose. I was right to be afraid, for Isabel just burst at me, not angrily like Aunt Augusta, but in a nasty, cold way. She didn't call me unnatural; she called me a damn fool. She sat upon an Empire couch; it was covered in faded brocade and had straight, golden legs. From time to time she surveyed neutrally the vast drawing-room, made vaster by the tall Louis XVI mirrors that reflected endlessly into one another. So we argued in a twinkling corridor.

"How you can be such a little fool," said Isabel, "I can't understand. You've never done anything queer until now. Really, it's hard to believe we're sisters."

"But, Bel! . . ."

"You're a perfect idiot. For no reason that I can see, except all this fuss about the obelisk, you go away, quarrel with papa, who's so easy to manage if only you never tell him the truth; you refuse an allowance as if you thought you'd have

to be grateful for taking it. And you start out in life with forty pounds. Forty pounds! Not enough to buy an opera cloak."

"I can work," I replied, a little arrogantly, though somewhat annoyed to feel that I couldn't buy an opera cloak. While I paused, I had a vision of the opera cloak I'd like to have: carmine velvet, not that rough scarlet, nor that vermilion with too much yellow in it, but true carmine velvet of a red that has a little blue in it. And I'd edge it . . . marabout would look skimpy; monkey would be the thing.

"Work!" Isabel went on. "You talk like a suffragette. What's the good of work, except to get a red nose? What do you think you're going to do? Go to an office from eleven to three, or whatever the time is? Never go to a lunch party? Never be seen at a matinée? Catch trains? Lunch in A B C's, I suppose."

"But what else am I to do?" I replied, suddenly aggressive. "It's all very well for you. You're married to Gervers and he lets you have your way in everything. What would you have done if you'd been stuck away in Hampshire, listening to the churchwardens wrangling about obelisks, and never seeing any men, and when you did see a man, like Captain Stanhope, sticking a silly joke about sharing bathrooms. I'd like to know what you'd have done?"

"I'd have married Captain Stanhope," said Isabel. "The bathroom was a good beginning. It could have led to great things. That is, if he could afford me."

"Don't be silly, Bel. Everybody knows you aren't as hard as you make out. You wouldn't have married Captain Stanhope if you didn't care for him. You were crazy for Gervers."

Isabel smiled reminiscently. "Yes, I was rather fond of Gervers. Perhaps I was crazy. But then, Ursula, you know, I often go crazy. For instance . . ." She stopped, deciding to be discreet. "Never mind me. Since you're an ass, we'll have to find something for you to do. Well, now . . . come to lunch next week."

"All right," I said, feeling that this discovery of some-

thing for me to do was worthy of Mr. Dick. "What day will suit you?"

"Oh, any day—Tuesday, Wednesday. No, I'm lunching out on Wednesday. Say Thursday. Lots of people 'll float in. They always come on here when the Ritz is full."

Isabel was very like herself, and I could not help admiring her for enjoying herself in that rough way. She liked what she got, and I wondered whether I should care for the agitated life, people and always people, and the social security which makes it possible at any moment to build up a scratch lunch. It did not feel like a scratch lunch on Thursday, unless in the Isabel world everything is scratch. Gervers was not there, which was annoying, for I knew nobody. I gathered, less from mumbled introductions than from the conversation at table, who these people were. At first I did not say much, for five years of war had made me clear-headed and critical. Cadogan Square amused me because it was so far away from the girls of the government office, the evangelical memories of Nurse Garthorpe, and the rather sluttish melancholy of Mrs. Witham.

This house! Are there special architects, upholsterers, psychologists (all by appointment to His Majesty, King Plutus?) spending their lives on producing this? They always produce the same expensive and commonplace statue in the hall, the same study where nobody studies, with a green-pile carpet, and the inevitable large silver cigarette box. Always the cook produces a little scratched-up lunch, comprising caviare, red mullet, cutlets, a mousseline of fruit that looks like a cloud, while the cellarer of Plutus bottles claret that shrinks with age, democratic whisky, brandy that must be at least five stars. Coffee appears upon a silver tray too heavy to be carried by a woman. I remember in history something about a bishop who was crushed under a cope of lead. I wonder how he'd have stood a cope of gold? Gold may be lighter than lead, for all I know.

But, at Isabel's, nobody seemed to be groaning under a cope. I was sitting next a man called Mr. Bamburgh, a

stockbroker, I believe, portly, rubescent. Under his methodical, not very Jewish nose, the full, pleasant curves of his red lips let pass occasional, faintly hostile references to the Jews. Didn't I think this weather very trying? Was I thinking of going abroad? He could recommend Barolino's hotel in Venice. It was almost as good as the Central at Palm Beach."

"I'm staying in town," I say, feebly. I look down. I haven't the courage to tell him the truth. He espouses my mood. On the other side of me sits a Mr. Guthrie. Mr. Guthrie simply is not, except that he eats. He eats in beautiful silence. Isabel is flirting with a tall and rather handsome man whom they call Lord Alec. What a weak mouth above the Crusader chin that makes a little shadow on his collar. He is being grave. He is talking of the London County Council and thanking Providence that it has so little power to spend money.

"All these people," he murmurs, loftily, "they get pushed into positions they aren't fitted for. It's a great mistake, to hand over things to elected bodies. It's a pity we didn't learn from Germany what a skilled bureaucracy can do."

Mrs. Guthrie spicily interjects, "That's all very well, but we beat the Germans in spite of their bureaucracy."

To which Lord Alec replies that that's as may be and the table laughs at him. They don't respect Lord Alec, L.C.C. Is it a case of contempt breeding familiarity?

Mr. Bamburgh is now talking of the best hotel in Constantinople, of heat waves, of blizzards, of siroccos and simoons, his brown eyes twinkling and staring. There is in them a sheen as of gold. Do his eyes reflect the chrysanthemums that stand on a silver bracket, amber chrysanthemums? Farther sits a large, yellow man whose name I forget, perfectly dressed hair molded on his yellow head, mouth closed, chin rammed into collar, breaking into the politics with the statement that Jack's handicap is absurd and that he's bound to win the Stoke Poges handicap if they leave it at four. The men talk crossways, and I have time to consider the women, notably Mrs. Guthrie. She is rather

lovely in a hysterical way, with lustrous brown eyes, like madeira, surrounded by tired zones. She is astonishingly smart in a beige-tussore afternoon dress over which falls a black-silk bolero. On her hat is an aigrette that could never enter a motor bus. Her skin is clear and pearly, as if her creator, instead of laying on separately the pink and the white, had mixed the two on a palette and uniformly spread the result. But the mouth is coarse, and not very skillfully molded with lip salve; the fingers are a shade too square; the voice, too, is a little harsh. Something wrong about her; those hands never knew the washtub, but who was the mother?

"I'm all for unselfishness," she says, "but one thing I won't do—I won't buy a hat for a country cousin. They always say I have no taste. Fancy my poor Cousin Ada with an aigrette! And I love aigrettes."

This produces a conflict with Mrs. Radway, who has social views and always supports plumage bills. She fixes a malevolent glance on Mrs. Guthrie's beautiful eyes, those eyes with the faintly bister eyelids, hunted eyes that contrast with the smiling mouth. Mrs. Radway is very different, tall, thin, incredibly agile and lanky. She expounds social principles. She would relieve the unemployed. What about allotments in all the parks? She goes on to support popular independence and parental responsibility. As she expounds she jiggles up and down in her seat. She makes me think of an ostrich that has swallowed a catherine wheel. And we go on. Everybody talks of something called Carbis, and I ask if it is a peer or a bay.

They yell at this frightful pun. Carbis turns out to be a horse. A horse that belongs to somebody called Clan. Clan is discussed; he's a giddy youth. We pass to cars. We all have cars for getting about. Why get about? But then we all have the fury of movement. While Mr. Bamburgh goes on to recommend a hotel in Cape Town, I hear the others: Everybody is going away, or just come back, or is going to stay with. Nobody is just staying. I catch scraps: "Last week-end at the Lydbrooks' . . ." "Cicely,

you know, she's just come back from Scotland, she says . . ." And so on. What would happen to these people if they went to gaol for three months and had to bear suspended motion? We do not talk about the opera, a picture, or a book. No, I must be fair; we have an excitement: the *Daily Mail* is booming a blind ex-officer as a sculptor.

"Blind!" says Mrs. Guthrie. "What delicate hands he must have!" Her eyes meet those of Isabel, and they exchange a half smile.

"I should say," remarks Mr. Bamburgh, ponderously, "that he'll make more money, now he's blind, than he ever did with his eyes. A blind sculptor! What an advertisement!"

Then we go upstairs, we women. My shameful situation is exposed. Mrs. Radway promises to see the Charity Organization Society on my behalf. For employment or relief, I wonder? I talk to Mrs. Guthrie, for I like her savage eyes. She's a fool, but I can't help liking her when she explains that she's terrified of thunderstorms, and so, when she's in a car, she always wears shoes with india-rubber soles, these being nonconductors. We get on beautifully. Won't I come to tea? To lunch? To anything? Is this the dawn of fortune? Alas! a fortnight later, Mrs. Guthrie disappears into a private home for morphine maniacs. She comes back, I find, a year later, cured of her vices and of her good looks.

"Cheer up," says Isabel, as I go. "I'll look out and find something, even though you are a prawn. Oh, you nutty little prawn! why didn't you stay at home and get properly married? Then you could have let things rip. Well, it can't be helped. See you soon, and if you must wear stiff collars, for my sake don't have washable ones."

I say good-by. In the hall I tickle the nose of the Abyssinian cat. He has immense, voluptuous eyes of liquid amber, in which float two narrow black lunes. His coat exhibits a fantastic tabbiness; if you turn it back it exhibits another pattern. Isabel has even a reversible cat. As I walk away he does not turn his head, but lets his sated, indolent gaze, wholly detached from preoccupation, free from respon-

sibility and love, rest upon that little space of air where a moment before I stood and now stand no more. I am an incident to this prince among cats. To him first I was not, then I was, now am no more; the narrow, cruel, black lunes take in as much and no more of the empty air. He is the rich world to which, I feel it in sudden agony, once I was not, then was, and already am no more. Slowly his eyelids droop, veiling the clear amber of his eyes. His close-barbered head sinks into the good lines of Nature's coat and skirt. The Abyssinian cat purrs his content as a song sweet to his own ears; he has been fed.

Chapter III

Experience

I

IT was rather exciting, searching the advertisement columns of the *Telegraph* and the *Times*. Advertisements are such individual things. Their length or their brevity reveals, on the one hand, the fussy, on the other the casual; the clipped word must mean economy; the statement of the name and address of the advertiser, shamelessness, or a conscience devoid of guilt. At least, I think so. I like to weave personalities round these demands for "Short. typ. (lady) exp." I have a vision of the one who sends out this little lonely message into the world of labor, like the Chinaman who floats a boat of golden paper on the Yangtze-kiang, trusting that it will reach his god. Where does it come from? A palatial bank? An excited theatrical office? Or a mellow room lined with books for the purpose of authorship? All that concealed under Box T. 4978.

The trouble was that I never found out who hid behind Box T. 4978. Answer as fully as I might, urge my qualifications, protest my willingness, reduce my salary even to two pounds . . . nothing happened. They didn't like me. There was something, I expect, about my replies which failed to seduce. This enraged me, for I felt if only I could see these people! Which means that I had some secret faith in my appearance and in my winning way. But it was very expensive, as well as rather sore work, for the postman knocked as much as he liked, but never brought for me one of those longish envelopes with an embossed stamp on the back, or romantically inscribed, "If not delivered return to the Something Company." I was so angry that I spent

seven shillings on inserting an advertisement myself. All I got was a long envelope from a middle-aged widower in Essex. He needed a little typing and no shorthand, but merely general services. How old was I? Would I send my photograph? The war has not developed the young English maiden so much as people say, for I hesitated. It sounded like an easy job, and I had a vision of a beautifully polished, courteous widower, slightly misunderstood by a blatant world. If it hadn't been in Essex!

It was that hesitation that helped to bring me into contact with my neighbor in the back room, whom I'd met once or twice upon the stairs. She was a tall girl, darker even than myself, good-looking in a way, with large features, a thick under lip, and rather prominent brown eyes. She had mumbled something that sounded like "Good morning," but I knew nothing more of her except her sounds. Oh, those lodging-house sounds! They're bitter things, coming to you anonymously when you're alone in your room with nothing to do, with nobody to go to. You hear the clink of china. Water flows. You can't hear the scraping of the towel, but a little later a drawer opens and closes. Then you hear nothing for a long time, except a wailing barrel organ in Dorset Square. You listen; you have nothing else to do, for it is too early to go to bed; and you're sick of reading. Your neighbor coughs, and, supremely free from self-consciousness, spits. Is it a cold? Is she bronchial? Or asthmatical? It's interesting; it's a fact. No doubt, Mabel Thornton, for that was her name, listened also to my sounds, though we did not make them at the same time. This created a sort of community; each knew what the other did. We might have gone on for a long time, bound miles thick, if it had not been that Miss Thornton also found it cheaper to cook on her fire. We both fried sausages together on different fires. What a lesson in Socialism, as Doctor Upnor would have said. This evening I was making a new dish, recommended to me by an old patient who had learned it from the Germans, a delicious thing called, I believe, *Armer Ritter*. The poor knight, according to the

recipe, took several slices of bread, soused them in milk in which was mixed the yolk of an egg, and fried the result, adding sugar later on. It was lovely, worth fivepence for an egg; milk was very dear too. So I put a little water into the milk; the eggs were farmhouse eggs. It didn't matter. I was rather hungrier in London than I had been in Hampshire. The air, I suppose.

Well, just as I was taking out the second slice, there was a knock at my door and the girl came in:

"Have you got a match?" she said, gloomily. "My fire's gone out." I held out the match box. "The fire always goes out," she went on.

We looked at each other for a moment, and perhaps I was sensitive that night, I drew an additional meaning from that remark; as I looked at her, I found myself thinking of life and wondering if the fire always went out. Queer girl. I saw her better now. She had fine black hair, rather matted; her skin was greasy, but she had good teeth and beautiful, rather large hands. She looked unkempt and uncared for. I rose from my knees, for she still stood there, turning the match box round and round, listening to the matches clattering.

"One has to eat," she said, and I saw in her eyes something that frightened me, for it was so unhappy. It broke through my reserve, for I replied:

"Yes, one has to eat something to keep alive. One wonders why."

"Oh, you feel like that, too!" she said, with a little smile. She nodded toward the frying pan. "What are you making there?" I told her.

"Oh, sounds a bit thin. The sort of thing women are supposed to like. Men go on at us about it, don't they? If we had men's wages . . . but what's the good of talking!" She went out, punctiliously returning my matches a few minutes later. I did not talk to her again for several days. She did not offer herself, as if she grudged the confidence she had given, and I couldn't offer myself. I didn't do those things easily then, and I don't now. This reserve! It's un-

bearable. It cuts you off. It cuts you off when you don't want to be cut off, when you're screaming with loneliness. I've looked out into Balcombe Street, where nothing happens. It's about half past six and night is falling. No taxis pass and the tradesmen have done for the day. One or two people return from work. I leave that window, which opens upon nothing, and tell myself I was a fool to leave my people, where, at any rate, somebody would cook for me. But I needn't cook yet, so I walk up and down my room, and it isn't a long way, to and fro and across like the puma at the Zoo. Nothing is mine outside these walls, and I can't get out because there's nowhere to go. I look at the furniture again, at the *History of Scotland* on the red-serge tablecloth.

I try to read. Poor as I am, I subscribe to the library, and still I follow the authors Doctor Upnor indicated, to whom I add a few on the advice of the *Times* Literary Supplement. I have two to chose from to-night, both very dear to me, *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The White Peacock*. Which shall it be? Forster, and beauty of mind, or Lawrence, and beauty of soul? Ghost of nymph, or nymph's white flank gleaming in the glade. Or shall I drink a draught like champagne, tart and bubbling, from Anatole France in *The Revolt of the Angels?*

Oh, I know it all, I know it all. I'm sick of my books. I wish I drank. Then I walk up and down again, and to and fro, until suddenly I rebel. The streets are mine as well as everybody's. I'm angry. I drag on my coat. I smash my hat over my brows. (Men don't understand how protected a woman feels when she's got her hat well down over her eyebrows.) I go out. It is dark, coldish, dampish. Gloom in the streets, and a greater gloom outside the blazing shops, full of venal welcome, the big hotels, full of costly gayety. I am not of these things; I haven't enough money in my pocket; no friends upon my list. No friends as poor as I. These things aren't mine; they only belong to my eyes.

A man is following me. I am used to that; I am used to snubbing and sulking without resentment. I think them silly, rather, those people who look into your face, pass you,

then stop suddenly to look into the window of, say, a laundry, devoid of any interest, so that they may look again when you pass and venture to speak. This one does not try to pass me. His tread is measured. A soldier? Perhaps. An Australian? He'll be troublesome. Still he does not gain on me. Perhaps he is not following me, but only going the same way. Irritating this. Which is it? Now he gains on me, and by a sideways glance I see that it is a not ill-looking officer. He says "Good evening"; I say nothing, but only walk a little faster. Oh, I don't like him, I don't like him . . . but a sudden sense of my loneliness comes to me. I've nothing to do. Why shouldn't I? After all, if I'd met him at a dance, what harm would there be in it? He's not familiar; he's talking with amiable idiocy of the evil weather; he tries to move me by telling me that he's at a loose end. My God! don't I know that? But I can't answer. Every instinct tells me not to be a prig, cries out that there's no harm in this acquaintanceship of a few hours. I know there's no harm, for I'm no fool, but . . . I suddenly slip past him and jump into an omnibus that has pulled up to deposit a passenger. And as I stand, swaying at the rail, I am almost crying, because I have thrown away this chance of company; this motor bus is taking me I don't know where; the bitter part is that it doesn't matter where. It's all the same. All crowds provide the same loneliness for the individual. But I can't do it. A dozen times in my life I've tried, but at the last moment, even when I have replied, when I have been attracted, I couldn't go on. The hands of the dead women of the Trent clan, women who didn't do this sort of thing, have plucked me by the skirt and pulled me away.

II

Why is one like that? One's afraid. Men are frightening, not because one thinks silly things, that one's going to be kissed in Piccadilly Circus, or drugged, or kidnaped; one knows that only happens in the Sunday papers. But men go so fast; they never wait for us. They begin making love to

us before we've made up our minds that they're wearing the right kind of collar and tie. They haven't bothered about our equivalent of collar and tie. They don't dwell upon minor pleasures. If they are of an inferior class . . . one just can't. (Though all men are of an inferior class to women, because they lack external delicacy; they are often our spiritual superiors, but their exterior! It takes a lifetime of education to teach a man to clean his nails, to get the glaze off his forehead, and to clean his teeth before caressing us. Yet, I don't like them when they're too highly polished and smell of *eau de Cologne.* Oh dear, I'm hard to please.) And if they're of the same class, one can't take the risk of meeting them normally after a casual experience. It would be awful.

So I went on answering advertisements. I got so far as being interviewed by a Harley Street surgeon who needed a secretary; he did not think me unsuitable, but told me bluntly that I was too pretty for him. He was perfectly nice about it, and very sympathetic. As he put it: "A good-looking girl who works is out for a lot of trouble unless she has the rare luck to come upon a cynical employer. I mean an employer who responds to her charms, but is disabused as to the quality of his own emotions."

I related this puzzling experience to Mabel Thornton. "Oh," she said, "he must be balmy. I've never met one who was—how did he put it?—disabused with the quality of his own emotions, and I've been working for twelve years."

She was twenty-eight, and in those twelve years had filled seven situations, starting as a learner in a typewriting agency, passing through several offices; for a time she acted as secretary to a dramatist who was affectionate and suffered from eczema. Now she was a clerk at Lealholme & Rotherby's, the big Oxford Street drapers. She did not talk much about her work. She was intelligent. As she put it: "They always tell you to take your work seriously. Well, we've got to do that; men see to that, but it's the rest."

"What else is there?" I asked, for I was very depressed then. "It looks as if one just ground on and ground on."

"One does," said Miss Thornton. "That's about it. One'd go off one's rocker if there wasn't anything else." She paused. "Men are beasts. Oh, I don't say one can do without them; no! that's the beastliness of them. You wouldn't believe it, Miss Trent, but a man can be fair spoken to you day after day and night after night, and swear you're the only one, and the first one, and you'll swallow it, want to, of course, being a fool. He'll give you things and treat you to things . . . and you'll go home of nights, moving your lips one against the other to taste his last kiss again. But while you're doing that he's after somebody else. Oh, one doesn't know, of course," she went on, hurriedly, "and it's just not knowing drives one crazy. I tell myself . . . I mean, one thinks: What's he doing now? Suppose it wasn't true that he only gets away from the office at seven? He goes to the same place for lunch every day; there are waitresses there. And what about the office? What about the girls there? He said he went to see his mother the other night. Well, that may be true, but it mayn't be." She clenched her hands. "One doesn't know, one can't know. One wants to live in a tin with him. Then one 'd be sure."

I did not reply. Obviously she was revealing herself. She was so intense that, just then, with her dirty hair, her glowing eyes, she looked wild and beautiful. She broke off with a laugh.

"What a lot of silly talk I let off. You mustn't mind me. I'm often taken like that." Then she once more promised to try and get me a job at Lealholme's, and went out. Soon I heard her slamming drawers and cupboard doors. She went out nearly every night, either with him, I supposed, or to walk off this torture of suspicion. To spy on him, perhaps. Who could say?

III

I told Uncle Victor one or two of my experiences in the street. Uncle Victor is rather nice. At that time he was fifty-six, the most determined bachelor I ever knew, and

lived in a flat in the Albany, decorated in George III style, painted in true Georgian green with gold moldings. He was entirely surrounded by a museum of Chardins, Bouchers, Buhl furniture, Sèvres china, and suchlike eighteenth-century impedimenta. I say impedimenta because I like white rooms furnished with one writing table, three hard chairs for the visitors, and a soft couch for me. But he gave very good dinners; his cook was his contemporary, and so was his valet. I remember at that time dining with him, and thinking, as I rested my elbow on his gleaming mahogany, that I was out of the picture in my last season's evening frock. He was very nice, rather like my father, but a little shorter, and his eyes twinkled more. He made me visit the flat, even his bedroom, where he slept in an enormous bed under a canopy on four poles. It was covered with a flowered bedspread, one of the few thousand bedspreads that have decorated the couch of Marie Antoinette.

"You mustn't stay long in this room, Ursula," he murmured. "Miskin is either dumb or discreet, but he has his limits. Also my pictures are not edifying." He pointed toward two little French prints, rather on the edge, and added: "Don't look at them. This room is very unsuitable for a young girl. She might see on the mantelshelf too many pretty faces in plain frames. Do not look at your old uncle's past, Ursula, lest you think evil of his present, and grow," he sighed, "unduly optimistic as to his future."

I had to turn away from the pretty faces in the silver frames. But, judging from the way in which they did their hair, they could not all belong to Uncle Victor's past. As he led me out of the room by the arm, which he held a little unnecessarily high above the elbow, I said: "Oh, Uncle Victor, I *am* shocked. If I weren't one of the family you wouldn't exhibit . . . these portraits."

He smiled. "No, of course not. One must have tact. Now and then a portrait must be withdrawn . . . for the day. It can always come back a little later, after an interlude. Every portrait is an interlude, Ursula. And a hundred interludes make a life."

He was rather charming. He was, to me, half uncle, half flirt. He treated me as if I were grown up, and pretended to be very shocked when I told him that I had been tempted to listen to the soldier instead of jumping into the bus:

"My dear Ursula," he said, "how can you have had such . . . an untraditional emotion? Girls of your kind don't do these things, at least not in peace time. When there's no war on there are no lonely soldiers. At least, after what's happened during this war, I can hardly believe any of them are lonely."

Still, he questioned me, warned me against many dangers which had not occurred to me. The varieties of ways in which my undoing might be brought about seemed to preoccupy his imagination. I almost formed the idea that Uncle Victor would be pleased as well as censorious if I got into a scrape; he could have put it right so beautifully. But he did not suggest that I should go home. Instead he offered me a twenty-pound note. I refused, I don't know why, but promised to borrow money from him later if I had to take it from anybody.

"Never borrow from a man you don't know," he said, more seriously. "They expect too much per cent. Or is it so much? But I mustn't say those things to you."

Did he want me to be compromised? Was it intolerable to the dear old *viveur* that any woman should stay uncompromised, even his niece? As I think of him now, I understand him better: If I had been compromised, just a little, I should have been more *piquante*, more accessible, though forbidden. There would have been a sparkle in our relationship.

IV

When I came home I found on the table a note from Mabel Thornton informing me that if I called at Lealholme's next morning I might be given a temporary job. They were engaging a number of clerks for stock taking, immediately after Christmas.

It lasted three weeks. Three weeks I noted, while a young man sang. He wore glasses and held serious views; he was grieved when my cigarette case fell out of my little bag. It is unforgetable, this song:

"Sox, navy 2,271! Ditto, tartan Mackzie 243! Ditto T. mactosh 71! Ditto T. McLeod 188! Ditto T. Fraser! Ditto T. Sinclair! Ditto T. Gordon!... Ditto T!... Ditto... !"

We sang songs of camisoles, chanted pajamas, and hummed suspenders. Then I posted the stock book in a clear hand. It was febrile, for Lealholme's had not engaged quite enough clerks. Perhaps that was why I was put on the adding up, but I stayed on this dizzy eminence only a day because the checkers discovered that I seldom obtained the same total if I cast up top to bottom as when I did it from bottom to top. It went on for three weeks, blouses ling., ditto insert., and ditto, ditto. I ceased to know what I was doing and it didn't matter. I began to lose count of time, until Saturday evening (no early closing for us) left me unemployed, and gasping as a starfish on a beach. After a fortnight I woke up on a Sunday morning, murmuring: "Corsets full fig. 410!" Just as my three weeks ended I was beginning to think that this had begun in the dim ages that preceded history, and would go on as long as history. Yet I was sorry to lose the job. After all, I was getting two pounds ten a week, and I was half sorry to leave the young man with glasses, who was called an improver. I am afraid that he didn't improve me much, and I never kept my promise to come to a chapel which he favored, just off Edgware Road, even though he pleaded:

"Come to our little Beulah, Miss Trent." His voice went down a semitone: "It's not too late, for there is a fountain filled with blood in which you may yet be cleansed. You won't?" he said in a more melancholic tone, and went on folding Bolton sheeting. So I left him. No doubt he is still folding.

I was out of a job again, and I did not that night conceal my anxiety from Mabel Thornton. She was not very sympathetic, for she had often been out of a job herself.

"Oh, don't let that worry you. You'll get another shop. If that's all you've got to bother you, you'll be all right."

I couldn't help respecting her. She was so unafraid, had grown used to fighting the world and beating it. I felt inferior. After all, we girls of the well-to-do class hang about, costing our parents some hundreds a year, and the most we do is to hold up the sugar tongs and say, "One lump or two?" We tire out our mothers, calling on people, and sitting up while we dance, and our poor old parents go on keeping us until they can find a man who'll take us on instead.

"Marriage," she exclaimed, "what a game! We all think it's going to be romantic. I was reading such a pretty book the other day, called *The Rosary*. Sounds all right, marrying a blind man, until he starts tumbling over the furniture and getting in the way. Sounds all right, marrying anybody, until you see the people who do it. I tell you what I think: marriage is only a dodge for getting rid of being in love. Seems to do it right enough, anyhow."

"Oh," I murmured, "don't you think it's worth while if you're in love?"

She turned to look at me, her mouth retracted, two deep folds surrounding it. "Worth while?" she said. "Well, I suppose so. One's a fool; one can't help it. I suppose I'm in love, if waking up in the middle of the night and running about the room like a crazy thing because I've dreamed he's with some other girl . . . well, if that's being in love, I am. If looking at him and noticing for the first time the way his hair slopes away over the ears and feeling weepy, if that's being in love, well there you are. And feeling all soft and swoony just because he's helped you into the bus by the elbow." She buried her face in her hands; I guessed she was crying. Indeed she was, for she added, brokenly: "And he can't care like that . . . other things . . . a girl . . . can't think of anything else. I don't mind billiards . . . but just to see him look sideways at the girl who brings him a cup of tea at the A B C. Just to know he's pals with his sister-in-law; natural enough, I suppose," she raised her wet face,

"but I can't bear it." She stood up suddenly: "Ah, that 'll do. I don't want to be soppy."

Her intensity frightened me; she was so entirely given up to this passion for a man whom obviously she suspected. That reference to the waitress, and another she had made, brought up a picture of this young man, a rather jolly young clerk in the city, with a taste for bright ties and socks, whose salary didn't allow him to marry, and who whiled away his bachelordom with the waitress who served him daily, with the shorthand typist in his office, with some girl met in the train, and negligently left at his feet my poor neighbor, in an agony of apprehension and self-surrender. It was awful. A woman in love is worse than a man; she's so abject. I think a man's vanity gives him a sort of backbone when he's like that; even when he kneels he is offering us an honor. But a woman can't kneel; it isn't that she must grovel, it's that she likes it, she wants his foot on her neck.

I went on answering advertisements. I was interviewed and asked out to dinner. Didn't go. Wonder why I didn't go. He wasn't so bad, and I felt so divorced from the past. That was my fault: I had been cruel enough to refuse to go home for Christmas, and to write a priggish, swanky letter about the need for putting all my energy into my career. My parents, I felt, were sentimental, and I wasn't going to pander to their silly desire to collect their family during the three or four absurd days when good will is compulsory. I had answered their sentiment with brutality. What a little beast I was! Youth isn't kind; it's as clear as crystal and as hard.

Chapter IV

Mrs. Vernham

I

RELIEF did not come in a long envelope. It came in a telegram from Isabel:

Call to-day Mrs. Vernham novelist 212 Connaught Street wants secretary wear pale pink Isabel.

Good old Isabel! But my gratitude was overlaid with surprise and perplexity. Why wear pale pink? Besides, I hadn't got a pale-pink blouse. Should I buy one on the chance? But why? I only understood later! Pink blouses for pale novelists, I suppose. But shirts were very dear: I couldn't get anything in Jap silk under twenty-five shillings, and if she didn't engage me I'd have to wear it. Me in pale pink with my amber skin! No, I couldn't do it. If I were starving, perhaps. Besides, I had a pale-blue blouse which would go with my ratine coat and skirt. It would have to be blue. Blue for benevolent novelists.

Mrs. Vernham was the first novelist I have ever met—indeed, the first writer but one. The other was one of the *Punch* men, who had come to Ciber Court for the week-end. He would talk of nothing but political economy because he was sick of being looked upon as a humorist. Mrs. Vernham would be different. I had read no book of hers, and constructed in my mind a still beautiful woman, with red hair, long green eyes, who would lie upon a couch covered with a leopard skin and dictate flaming thoughts, while her jeweled hand toyed with fatal orchids in a green vase. This was no doubt because I had been reading a little Elinor Glyn. One

would pass one's days in a dream of passion. Charming Russians, elegant Italians, and possibly even suave Egyptians would send in expensive chocolates and romantic photographs. It would be lovely.

I still had time to buy one of Mrs. Vernham's books, an eighteen-penny edition from the Marble Arch bookstall, and skimmed through it in the Park. I felt this to be diplomatic. Mrs. Vernham seemed to have written a lot of books besides this one, which was called *The Rose of Yesteryear*. I remembered hearing the titles of others: *Princess Petunia*, *The Fiancée*, and I was sure that I had read *Little Lady Lingard*, but it had left no trace. I just had time to read *The Rose of Yesteryear*. It was about a woman of thirty-eight, whose heart had been broken when she was eighteen; in spite of all temptations brought about by her beauty and her virtue, she refused to have it mended because she was consecrated to the memory of Him, who was ill-mated but faithful. She became his sweet consoler. She even reconciled him with his wife, pointing upward from time to time. She gave, on their birthdays, presents to his children, who were called Egbert, Lorna, Esmeralda, and Corydon. Then the wife died, and roses were planted upon her grave, the heroine watered them every Sunday morning after church. The children needed a mother, but the heroine's ideal stood too high; she could not lower her dream. But at last the children called for her, and something within her called for them, and something else called in general. The little children cut bunches of roses from their mother's grave, and brought them to the heroine, followed by Him, who took from his pocketbook a faded rose that twenty years before he had taken from her hair in the conservatory of Towers Castle. And the little children turned away their heads modestly from the coronation of their new mamma.

Yes! a pink blouse would have been better. It was too late. But I still had time to go to the ladies' cloak room and bring my hair down well over my eyes. I looked 1895 when I appeared before Mrs. Vernham. She was about fifty, and her main suggestion was one of majesty. She had light-

brown hair, dressed in rather angular and extraordinarily neat fashion. It failed to fit her general coloring, somehow; it transformed her a little. Under absent eyebrows lay two aggressive little gray eyes. The mouth was small, and made smaller by a little congregation of pink chins which eventually found their termination in a black-silk bodice that centered about a large cameo brooch. These impressions came later. The first thing I noticed was Mrs. Vernham's nose, a considerable, an Albert Memorial nose. That nose, finely molded enough, but with a masculine curve, suggested endless power to dominate, but she was quite amiable.

"You have been recommended to me by your sister, Miss Trent. Of course, I know that family affection might make your sister overlenient, but these testimonials that you show me are fairly satisfying. Yes, I am quite well impressed."

Then I saw her teeth. Whenever Mrs. Vernham finished a sentence, she punctuated with a profound pause, during which, with a little forward jerk of the head, she exhibited an incredible number of teeth. She paused upon her teeth. I overcame my attack of dental fascination and urged my willingness, my interest in literature.

"Yes, yes, I'm quite sure you will do very nicely. Though it is a little unfortunate that you have been in a government office, Miss Trent. During the war I was considerably concerned with the official committee on clerical discipline. I saw very regrettable things, Miss Trent—tendencies in speech, in costume!" (Dental pause.) "Still, I'm quite sure that this was equally uncongenial to you and that only patriotism made you tolerate . . . Well, we need not enter into that. I will dictate to you as a test."

I passed my test fairly well. No wonder, for the fragment Mrs. Vernham was composing extraordinarily resembled *The Rose of Yesteryear*, except that this time *He* was called John. "Such a strong name!" murmured Mrs. Vernham as she dictated. Then, "He was the best type of English manhood; Eton and Oxford had . . ."

Finally I was engaged after a little difference as to salary.

"I never paid more than thirty shillings a week before the

war, and I think it's a great concession to make it two pounds. You must realize, Miss Trent, that your position here is quite different from the one you would have in an office. You tell me you are interested in literature, well!" (Dental outbreak.)

"Oh yes," I said, "I read a great deal, and, Mrs. Vernham, I'd love to come to you. I've read nearly all your books, *The Fiancée* for instance, and I loved *Little Lady Lingard.*"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernham, dentally, "I hope you appreciated the point of view of Claribel. The critics were most unkind to me."

"Yes," I said, hurriedly, and rushed to cover—namely, to *The Rose of Yesteryear.*

"All right," said Mrs. Vernham, at last, "we'll say two pounds five, but that's only because I must have a lady. I couldn't bear a person of the lower class."

So we began. I was happy in a way. After all, at last I had a job. I was earning money, real money. I told Mabel Thornton that night, and was flattered by her envy. For Mabel really loved *Little Lady Lingard.* I didn't mind it, for in those days I hadn't got as clear ideas about fiction as I have now, and, indeed, at first I took quite an interest in the triumphs and misfortunes of Claribel, of Annabel, in the moated granges, and the manses; I supplied details when the lover went shooting and the heroine hunting. It was not very hard work. Mrs. Vernham dictated every morning from about half past ten to half past twelve, leaving me to transcribe in the afternoon. My shorthand was just about good enough, and Mrs. Vernham made no fuss about typing: "You see," she remarked once, "I don't want you to waste your time retyping pages that are a little faulty. In my earlier days it would have mattered; it would have made a bad impression, but now it's all I can do to satisfy the commissions I receive." (Dentalism.)

She had an immense idea of her own importance, and twice in the first fortnight I was told how some years before she had been rung up by the editor of the *Times*, who per-

sonally begged her and implored her to produce, in time to go to press, a three-thousand-word article on Woman, Her Past and Her Future. Mrs. Vernham went to the office. She was greeted on a metaphorical red carpet. A subeditor seized the sheets she flung down; the foreman printer, followed by the printer's devils, stood respectfully outside, gasping for her copy. It was heroic.

She sat on committees; occasionally she formed part of a deputation. She lectured on virtue and its vanishing, on true love and on literary style, to ladies' clubs, and to the uninformed. She left me every afternoon to see publishers and editors, to object to wrappers, to demand new efforts from her agent. She was everywhere, knew all who were willing to know her and many who weren't. She appeared at the Botanic, at the Church Congress, and at Cart Horse Parade. She had a tooth in every pie.

A few days later, as tea was brought up to me, I became conscious of a new factor in the house, of a young man of about thirty. This was Philip Vernham, my employer's nephew. Until then I had met him only once on the stairs, and had an impression of a very pale face, rather dead-looking black hair, a clipped mustache, and blue eyes. Irish-looking, except that his features, especially his mouth, were too well-cut. I gathered from the occasional remarks of Mrs. Vernham, who had to talk about her nephew as about her committees, her clothes, her future, and her past, because they were hers, that his name was Philip, that he had just been demobed and was looking out for a job as a civil engineer.

"Of course Phil needn't hurry. I don't want him to do just anything. They'll want clever young men to rebuild Belgium and France."

As she paused upon those obtrusive teeth, for the first time I liked Mrs. Vernham; there was something so fond in the eyes that I looked away from the mouth that drooped as she spoke of him. It was clear that she adored him and that Phil was going to rebuild Europe all by himself. She sighed, "Boys are so difficult." I gathered that Phil was a spoiled

child. I knew that, one morning at least, he had breakfasted at half past eleven.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Vernham, with an air of self-reconstruction, "we mustn't waste our time. Paragraph?" Which meant that I must pick up the place where we had stopped the day before.

" . . . And a great sweetness, sweet as an April morn, stole over them. As if calling across the deep a voice . . ."

"A voice," repeated Mrs. Vernham, dreamily, "that had been gathering strength through the ages, to call unto these two that were joined . . . no, not joined . . . ah! united."

As I took down, various emotions filled me: a certain interest in the story; a feeling of automatism, of taking down without knowing what I was doing, quite; a preoccupation with Philip Vernham, spoiled and rather pleasant to think of. The last feeling predominated, so that in the afternoon I found that once or twice I put down "his blue eyes," instead of "her blue eyes." (Mrs. Vernham's heroines were always fair.) Then I forgot all about him. One reason was that I had troubles of my own. From November until the end of February I had spent over thirty-six pounds, and when I think of what I was, I can't understand how I managed to spend so little, for it worked out at about three pounds a week. But I was getting forty-five shillings a week, and though I paid only eight shillings for my room, I didn't seem to be able to manage. There was breakfast, four shillings a week, not much money and not much breakfast; there was lunch, and though I went to Lyon's and the A B C that was another six or seven shillings a week. Tea cost nothing, for it was given me, to be taken in my own time, and again not much time and not much tea. But dinner was very awkward, because I did not yet know that the workinggirl does not dine, but sups. I had ridiculous ideas about soup, fish, entrée, joint, and savory; so, half the week, I revolted against the cremation of sausages on my fire, and rushed out in a desperate, debauched way to the expensive Italian restaurant, or to Sam Isaacs' and cod's roe. Oh, cod's roe! I'm a pig, I can't help it; it's one of my forms of sensuality.

Then there were horrid details: washing, for I changed my underclothes much more often than a virtuous girl needs. I had a frightful laundry bill: four shillings a week! And coal! And light! And fares! And foolish moods when I just had to go to a cinema, or to buy a china pig, or something to wear. That was it. I could live on forty-five shillings a week, but I could not clothe myself. I knew it could be done, but I didn't know how. Mabel Thornton did not help me because her budget was muddled up by her boy, Jim, who took her out to dinner and afforded her pleasures. What was I going to do? My boots needed soling now—eight and six—and I ought to go to the dentist. Also I must be waved now and then. A life on the absent wave, I felt, would not be worth living. So one week I was four shillings down, another ten shillings. Once I saved sixpence.

"It's your own fault," said Mabel. "There you sit at home and mope, paying everything for yourself. I can't make you out. If I were you and had your looks I'd have got myself off long ago."

We had rather a quarrel over that, because I mistook the meaning of getting oneself off, and Mabel was furious. I gathered that one only got oneself off superficially, and that the reward was chocolates, cigarettes, pit seats, food, and ginger ale. As we grew reconciled, Mabel failed to explain how I could get myself off. "One meets men," she remarked, vaguely. "If you're clever you can keep 'em off it. If you want to," she added, gloomily, and suddenly became secretive.

I suppose it was this conversation facilitated the approaches of Philip Vernham, though accident had to do with it. (As Mabel put it, "One meets men.")

It was in the afternoon, when Mrs. Vernham was out, bullying the publisher, flattering the manager, and kissing the compositor so as to get her book advertised. (Phil put it like that.) I was typing a letter to a lord, where "your lordship" figured every three lines. His lordship was the chairman of one of Mrs. Vernham's committees, a committee for the training of discharged and demobilized female govern-

ment staffs. I did not hear the door open, and a sudden giggle formed as I had a vision of the discharged and demobed flappers whom Mrs. Vernham wanted to educate in bookkeeping and ethics. The poor children! They'd had such a lovely time during the war, buying face powder three years earlier than they expected, breaking their hearts over soldiers, and earning as much money as their fathers used to. Now they were to be given the Y. M. C. A. vaccine, warranted to make one immune (comparatively) against passion and other worldly pomps, to induce the taste for hair scragged *à la* virtue and not *à la* Delysia. I remembered Miss Moss in the Food Control, carefully entering the office on stilts that had been fitted to her shoes in lieu of heels, putting on her gloves to boil the kettle, sealing a love letter on mauve paper with primrose sealing wax. . . . She was married, but lots were not. I had a vision of Miss Moss when the D. D. F. G. S. had done with her. Enough to make one giggle.

"What's the joke?" said a pleasant voice.

I turned, confused. "Nothing."

He stepped forward, looked at what I was doing. "Oh," he said, "I see. Or rather, I don't. You seem to have found a joke in auntie's literature."

I refused to give myself away, and calmly he sat down. A few minutes later tea came in, and he ordered his own. I was rather shy of him. I felt inferior. I wasn't yet used to meeting socially people for whom I worked. The government was different, of course. He seemed to know a little about me.

"I hear you've run away from home," he remarked. "That's very enterprising. Auntie says you're a revolting daughter, and that she doesn't know that she ought to encourage you, but then she's a pal of Mrs. Osmaston's, and no doubt she thinks she'll reform you. She may, you know, so be careful. She always tries it on girls."

"And on men?" I said.

"Never. Thinks we're hopeless. Or likes us best as we are. You must have noticed that all her heroes have vices.

Haven't you? And that sweet feminine influence generally pulls them round about page three hundred, which leaves ten pages for the wedding within the ninety-thousand-word limit."

I laughed. He was rather pleasing, but there was something I didn't like in him. The voice? A faint cockneyism? Also he wasn't as good-looking as I had thought, for the features were too clean-cut, almost mean, and the blue eyes set too close together. Still, I couldn't be rude to him.

"You don't seem to care for Mrs. Vernham's works."

"Do you?" he asked.

"Is it a fair question?"

"Why not? No novelist is a heroine to her secretary. But never mind auntie's immortal works. Tell me about yourself."

I didn't tell him very much. I wasn't used to telling about myself. I told him in a garbled way that I was bored with the country, and, as my people wouldn't agree, had to come to town and work. I told him only what he knew.

"That's very sporting of you." He was not stupid; he conveyed at the same time admiration for my pluck and interest in my career. Several times he said he was wasting my time, and went on doing so. When he left, a little later, I realized that I knew nothing about him; he did not talk about himself; he had discussed my past, extracted from me a few hints of my present difficulties, cleverly suggested that my attractiveness would soon insure me friends. But of himself, nothing. That should have warned me. It took me years to find out that the man who holds forth to you for an hour about his golf or his engineering is not dangerous. If he attracts, it is just because he does, and that does not often happen; but the man who lends a ready ear to what you have to say of yourself, your fears, your hopes, who induces your confidence and asks no sympathy in return, is an infinite danger, because, endlessly asking nothing, he becomes a delicious habit. One doesn't need him, but one needs his ears. He becomes the sounding-board of one's own self, in a way one's visible self. And what can one refuse to oneself?

II

I had almost forgotten Monica when, one morning, a note came, saying that she never saw me now, and as she had *lots* of things to tell me, tea was no good, and wouldn't I come for the week-end? I went; I wanted a change. I wanted space and lots of light. It was not so very nice, after all. Monica's people had a big house in Rutland Gate, with a garden round it, and in the first hours it was delicious once more to see the large room round me, and no longer to hear the gas sizzle in the mantle, but to sit there, becomingly colored by electric light which was concealed in the cornice and reflected from the ceiling. It was nice to have for tea jam sandwiches, ham sandwiches, caviar sandwiches, and it would have been very nice at dinner, too, for the people were pleasant, talking in the familiar style, about Jessie who was coming back, and Charlie who was passing through, if it hadn't been for my frock. I wore my blue charmeuse; it wasn't very new, for I had danced in it a bit the previous summer. But that wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't had to wear it three times in the last three months, for Isabel and Uncle Victor: I'd gone in the bus.

I shouldn't say any more if I thought that only women would read this story, but men may do so, too. They don't know what it's like, evening frocks in a bus. Men sit there in their comfortable evening clothes of black cloth that last forever, and their patent-leather shoes that one could play football in. They look across at us and think we look so nice, with our dear little shoes of blue and gold, and our heads charmingly swathed in veils. They think we look very sweet and happy, while we think: The heel of my right shoe caught between two ribs on the floor of the bus. Is it scraped? And did the hem of my frock touch the step of the bus as I climbed in? If so, is it muddy? If it is muddy, is it touching my pale-blue stockings? Is the damp coming through my thin shoes? Or are my feet only cold? Oh, I wish I could lean back and rest my head against the window, but I

daren't; there's my hair. Hair! I'm positive that it 'll be wild before I get there. Fares! How am I going to find twopence in my little bag unless I take my gloves off? It 'll take five minutes to get my gloves off. . . .

It's no fun wearing an evening frock in a bus. We are finally dismayed when the conductor solemnly treads on those blue and gold shoes. Pain and mud. We get there at last, to see the others coming out of cars, out of another world—the others, the sisters, the rivals. *They* haven't got a bit of powder off the top of their nose, not having had to wrap their heads up. I had that bus feeling throughout the week-end. On the Saturday night we went to the theater, and afterward Monica came into my bedroom in a delicious dressing gown of pink crêpe de Chine edged with swansdown. She was going to be married. It wasn't quite public yet, because the engagement was only two days old. He was wonderful. He was second secretary at the Embassy, in Madrid, and only thirty-four. Even if the duke didn't help him, though of course he would, he'd be an ambassador. Monica would love Paris, though Petrograd would be nice when all this silly Bolshevism was over. Of course, they wouldn't be very well off. Redvers said that if she could run the palace of the Infanta Concepcion on four thousand a year, she ought to have the Royal Housekeeping Society's medal. Oh, Redvers was a darling. And she was so happy. It would be lovely in Madrid—lots of dances, and at the theaters they had plays . . ." she giggled: ". . . Redvers says they aren't squeamish over there, as we are." Of course he'd get lots of leave, for shooting in August. She wanted to go to San Sebastian, too, Redvers said they'd have a villa there.

It jarred. It was nasty of me, but I couldn't help it. I felt out of it, cut off from all these securities. If Monica didn't marry Secretary Redvers, I supposed she would marry Captain Hildebrand of the Guards, or promising young Selwyn, M.P. She only had to trot along nicely, enjoy herself, want what she got, and get it. Forty-five shillings a week! I weakened on the Sunday and asked Monica whether

she thought I'd done wrong, and whether I ought to go home. Monica thought I had done wrong. Above all, she thought me silly. But she didn't help me much, because, in a moment, we returned to Redvers. I saw then that I must fight this by myself. I understood it still better next day, as I meditatively extracted from steak and kidney pudding fragments that fortunately could not be identified; I realized that it was no use going with people like Monica. Their talk was not my talk. I couldn't go on disregarding my aloofness from the play of the day, from week-ends at houses like Ciber Court; I couldn't refuse to play bridge, and I wasn't good enough to do so. Above all, I couldn't again show that charmeuse frock; to do it up would cost ten pounds. No! Omnibuses can't consort with cars.

I don't pretend that I took this easily. Indeed, this renunciation was a sort of agony. I didn't have the glad content that I felt after that lunch at Isabel's, when I bade farewell to Plutus, for in those days I had nearly forty pounds; it seemed a lot of money, so I could afford to say good-by to Plutus, now Plutus was saying good-by to me. And he's a patronizing god. I was losing my old friends, and I had no new ones. It was that, I suppose, made me feel more kindly to Philip Vernham, who evidently was not pursuing very hard that opening as an engineer, for now he came in almost every day, wanting a book or a pencil; or had he left some notes on my table? He stayed sometimes a few minutes, sometimes half an hour. He was getting bolder now.

"It does seem a shame that you shouldn't have a better time, Miss Trent. It must be so dull for you in the evenings. What do you do with yourself?"

I told him.

"But don't you think it's a pity to stay lonely like that? When one's got eyes soft as those of an antelope, and hands like a spray of fern?"

I did not reply. He made me uncomfortable in a nice way. He went on analyzing me, the grace of my carriage, the amber quality of my skin. It was rather exciting; he sat in a chair,

not far from me, and now and then, as he leaned forward, I thought he would try to kiss me. That would be awkward in my position, for I didn't want him to, and yet I wanted him to want to. It was very nice being vaguely afraid. I grew a little more nervous a few days later, when I met him in the hall, his hat on, as I was leaving, for he said he was going my way, to St. John's Wood, and walked with me to my door, amusing and flattering me by asking me what I thought of the people we met, and stopping me seriously outside a milliner's in Edgware Road to discover a becoming hat. He took me to my door, and I was horribly embarrassed. Supposing he tried to come up? Mrs. Witham would never stand it. But he did not; he thrust into my hand a small parcel he had been carrying, and walked away, laughing: half a pound of chocolates, fifty Turkish cigarettes, and *The Young Visiters.*

What is one to do with a man like that? I wondered about him as, that evening, I smoked, nibbled, and laughed. I knew nothing about him. He was a shadow, a good-tempered, intelligent shadow. That made me feel important, for I was enormously myself, and he my reflector.

Next day he asked me to come out to dinner. I refused.

"Don't say no," he murmured, leaning toward me. "You're so delicious to look at." I hesitated; his admiration was so frank, and I love a brutal compliment. We all do. When a man bluntly says, "You're perfectly lovely," we have a mixed feeling, which amounts to: "What lies you tell! What a fool you are! But it may be you mean it, and it may be true."

So I said: "I don't think I ought to. Supposing Mrs. Vernham found out, she wouldn't like it."

"You needn't tell her. Of course she wouldn't like it. If you were a little frump she wouldn't mind. But do come. It isn't so very cheerful in the evening at the club, or here with auntie reading me selected bits from *Pretty Polly's Fortune.*"

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you to-morrow." He embarrassed me; he did not exactly please me in himself; only, in his

eyes, I was such a personality. But if I went out with him, what would happen? He'd be sure to make love to me. I didn't want that. Didn't I? In my perplexity I decided to consult Mabel.

I found it difficult to ask what more or less I meant—namely, should I let men make love to me or not? I wasn't used to discussing that sort of thing. While I sat in her only chair, by the fire, Mabel Thornton sprawled on the bed. She seemed listless.

"Mean to say there's a man after you?" she said.

"Well," I replied, made shy by crude truth, "not exactly that, but he talks to me and wants me to go out to dinner with him."

"Well," said Mabel, "why don't you go? Do you fancy him? If you don't, perhaps you fancy the dinner."

I did not reply at once. I did fancy the dinner, and so did not want Mabel to suggest it. "I don't want his dinners," I replied, grandly.

"What are you bothering yourself about, then?"

"Oh, dear," I sighed, "I don't know! Only I feel I'd like to; after all, I don't have a very good time, but if I go out with him he'll think he can . . . Well, you know what men are. I don't want him to. So if I let him spend money on me it wouldn't be fair."

Mabel suddenly sat up, shaking a clenched fist; her voice suddenly grew harsh. "Fair!" she said. "What's that got to do with it? Talk of being fair to men! You might as well talk of being fair to tigers. They'll use you, they'll play with you, they'll lie to you. Oh, they're beasts. You needn't trouble to be fair to them. My word! A man knows how to look after number one. Don't you take men like that, Miss Trent. You get what you can out of them. Feed out of their hand, and don't be afraid to bite it."

I was frightened. She sounded hysterical. So I murmured: "But surely you don't feel like that yourself? I don't want to seem inquisitive, but you've said that you, too, you've got somebody."

She slid off the bed, her skirt and petticoats rucking up

and showing her cotton stockings. "Yes, I've got somebody. Or somebody's got me. It's like the fly and the flypaper; who knows which is which? Do you think I like it? Do you think I enjoy it? But what's the good of talking to you! You don't understand what it means to have a man hold you in his arms, and as he kisses you to tell yourself, 'This is heaven.' And at the same time to smell his mustache and ask yourself: 'What's that scent? In whose arms was he half an hour ago?'"

"But," I said, "if you feel like that, why don't you let him go?"

Her eyes looked wild, small, brown, in big whites. "Let him go," she murmured. "How can you let a thing go when it's got you? If you feel faint when he takes your hand at the pictures . . . to say nothing of what it's like when you give him everything."

I was silent. I had not expected this confession. I knew, of course, that girls who aren't married sometimes have lovers in the full sense, but I'd never met one. This woman, acknowledging, was a sort of outlaw to me, an adventuress, different from me. She dared. I half admired her.

"Well," she said, roughly, "I suppose you're shocked, Miss Trent. You'd better get used to it in this world. I'd rather go on the streets to feed him than be what they call respectably married to anyone else. I don't care what he does to me, it's him. But don't you do it." She surprised me. How could she warn me against a course which seemed to enthrall her? She felt this, for she explained: "I don't mean it doesn't make one happy. It does that; I didn't know what happiness meant till I stopped refusing him. But when you do that you've half lost a man. He's got you. He knows. He feels safe of you. All the other women, he hasn't got 'em yet, and that's why they tempt him. And you don't know what he's up to. I suppose that's love, half hating. I could kill him so that nobody else could ever get him." Suddenly she burst into the most frightful sobs, and when, at last, holding her close, I managed to quiet her, she muttered: "I talk like that. And all the time I know . . .

things can't last forever. It could end to-day. Perhaps he's writing to me now to give me the chuck. I've always thought he was giving me the chuck, from the first word, as if it was too good to last."

III

Mabel Thornton did not help me much in my loneliness. She was too absorbed. I felt a complete emptiness. I went to Uncle Victor again, and at last borrowed twenty pounds from him, for I still didn't know how to manage, and in this bitter weather needed some new warm underclothes. I hadn't known what it was to be cold before. It makes one understand. Now and then I look at women loafing in Regent Street, and I wonder if they're cold. It's worse than being hungry. It gets you all over. And when you are, as I was, marooned in a little room, you feel ready for anything. Most people aren't marooned; they've got somewhere to go, friends of their own kind; they can go and sit in a warm room where people chat and have tea. I couldn't do that; Monica had shown me that. I hadn't the clothes, the habits; I couldn't humiliate myself by mixing with them. I hadn't the time for tea parties, the money for theaters; this meant new friends and I hadn't got them yet. It makes one understand. No wonder I wanted to go to dinner with Philip Vernham, even though this compromised me into something I didn't want. Just to sit at a meal with somebody who's friendly, to experience light, flowers, music, admiration. Instead of boiling one's kettle on one's grate and reading in the evening paper descriptions of the Chelsea Arts Ball. Something was breaking me, something different from what was breaking Mabel as she stirred her fire on the other side of the wall. Her troubles didn't help me, for the miseries of others do not ease our own. The thing that possessed her was killing her; but nothing held me at all, and I thought to die of that.

Chapter V

Between Two Showers

I

I WAS walking up Regent Street, just after half past ten, and was nearing the end of my energy. I had a sense of futility. I wasn't doing anything; I was just being, and snip, snip, snip, went the days of my life. It had been an awful Saturday. During the past three months, and particularly during the last two, my parents had pressed me to come back. Mamma had written tearful letters, in which she recalled her happiness twenty years ago, when the patter of little feet was heard in the nursery. This irritated me. One didn't hear the patter of little feet at Ciber Court. The walls were too thick. Mamma was so irritating in those moods. She made out a bill against one's emotions. Yet I felt a beast, and a beast again when I lunched with papa, who'd come up for the day. He behaved like a magistrate pointing out to a young woman the grave consequences of the course she was taking. We nearly quarreled; if it hadn't been at Claridge's we would certainly have quarreled. I grew rather rude at the end. "The sooner everybody understands that I'm not going to be interfered with, the better." As papa did not respond to this defiance, I recalled that I badly wanted an allowance now, so grew milder. "Of course, it's not nice being hard up. I know it's got to be faced, still, there it is. I'm poor, and it can't be helped."

Unfortunately papa did not rise, not that he was unkind, but ideas did not travel very quickly in his brain. I suppose he must have forgotten, for I did not get the allowance. We had tournedos, though, much nicer than the A B C steak pudding.

Indirect pressure arose from these letters and this interview. Thus, on the Saturday afternoon I had been to tea with Aunt Augusta, who gave me a good talking-to. My ingratitude, my hard heart, my probable immorality, all this streamed on me before and during tea. I had to get away almost by force, for Aunt Augusta held on to me so vigorously that I wondered whether I might be kidnaped. Aunt Augusta made one realize what a beautiful thing it is to be free. But free to do what? That evening I was coming back from Mrs. Vernham's lecture to the Sappho Club. The poor dear had been lecturing on love to a large number of females who looked as if a little practical demonstration would have been worth a ton of Mrs. Vernham's theory; poor little spinsters, widows who had seen better days, and middle-aged wives who preferred a lecture to their fireside. It made one gasp, all this talk about pure love, and holy love, and mystical love, and respect, and esteem. As I walked home, picking my way over the muddy pavement, I wondered what they'd have said if Mabel Thornton had put her point of view. But I was very unhappy, though I smiled.

These gratuitous entertainments! I had left behind the blazing theaters where thousands of people were seeing "Hullo, America!" and "Yes, Uncle." I was walking home, and now it was beginning to rain. Somehow, I didn't care; my coat and skirt were too old to hurt much, and so I walked on through the light shower, among the scattered passers-by, the couples that sought refuge in doorways. The rain grew heavier, and though I like to feel it on my face, I found the shower too heavy, and so stopped at Swallow Street to take shelter under the arch. After a moment I saw that a young woman was considering me. She was small, very white-faced, with dark eyes. She was muffled up in a black coat, and interested me because I perceived round her neck an unexpected toby frill. She looked such a little Quaker. As the rain went on, heavier and heavier, I flung her a little smile, as one does when something dramatic happens, and said, "It's coming down heavily, isn't it?"

She gave me a frightened look. "Yes," she said, "it's horrid weather." She spoke carefully, rather mincing. She couldn't be a Sister of Mercy, but she might be expending grave counsel and kind words in some cause of rescue. As the rain came down, violent now, decrepitating almost like hail, we began to talk. After a while she said, meditatively:

"One doesn't have much luck in winter, does one?"

"Luck?" I said, puzzled.

"Yes. They aren't larky when it's cold, are they?"

I was silent. The word "larky" seemed odd on those precise lips, and the idea of "luck" muddled me. Fortunately she went on:

"And it's so bad for one's clothes, this weather. If one goes round to the Hotel Vesuvius one's got to have an evening frock, and, after all, if one doesn't get off, one has to pay for one's drinks."

Suddenly I understood her, for I'd heard of the Hotel Vesuvius. I had a vision of the market place, little tables, strident women, gross men.

"Oh," I said, uncertainly, "yes, of course. It didn't strike me."

She looked at me suspiciously. "I say, how long have you been on the game?"

I guessed at her meaning. "Oh, I'm sorry." Then, plunging, "I'm a shorthand writer."

"Oh, I see," said the little woman, in the coldest voice. "I didn't know you were straight. Not that work means anything. There's many a girl in the City comes down to Piccadilly for a short time now and again. She's got to earn a bit like the rest of us. Still, I oughtn't to talk to you." She peered at the rain, made as if to go out.

I didn't like that. It was as if from the altitudes of her profession she looked down upon me. Certainly I was unadventurous.

"Why not?" I asked, in an irritated tone. "Why shouldn't you talk to me?"

"Well, you don't want to talk to me, do you? You know what I am. Women like you don't want to know my sort.

My sort can only know each other, except men, of course."

I was awkward. I didn't know how to talk to this kind of woman, and I felt I ought to talk to her in a special way, just as one has special ways for children, invalids, lunatics. She couldn't be an ordinary human being. So I floundered, trying to be polite.

"I suppose," I said, "it's a very interesting life?" Just as I might have said to an engineer that building bridges must be great fun.

"Interesting?" said the woman. "Oh, well, one has one's ups and downs; one has variety. One's got to do something, hasn't one, to keep alive? Of course, I don't know why one wants to keep alive, but one does." She spoke so well that I couldn't help wondering why she hadn't found something better to do. It didn't occur to me to consider whether I was doing better. "Well," she said, looking out again at the shower that was dying down, "I must be going."

Suddenly I conceived an immense desire to know this woman. There she was, after all, with eyes, and arms, and legs like everybody else, saying the same things, and living this extraordinary life. I wanted to know just how she'd come to it and what it was like. So I said, "Look here, you didn't mean what you said about women of my sort?"

"Mean that they don't want to know girls like me?"

"Yes. I'd like to."

She stared at me. "What's your little game?" Then she smiled. "I don't suppose you're up to any game, after all, only one gets suspicious. You look a kid."

"I'm twenty-five."

"And you've kept straight! Well, I'm damned!"

It was startling. She had said it so coolly and casually, as I should have said: "I'm surprised."

"I rather like you," she remarked. "My name's Vera Whistley. Come and have tea with me to-morrow." She gave me her address, and, carefully opening her umbrella, went out into the thinning shower.

II

I was very excited. I was on the edge of adventurous intercourse. I was doing something that no Trent woman had ever done before. (Though I suppose that my grandchildren will do things which they think no Trent woman has ever done before, and I shall have done most of them.) As I walked home, I plotted out questions to put to Vera. I would find out how she began and how she lived. I would have a peep into the underworld. It would be like an article in the Sunday papers. No doubt this excitement made my faculties sharp, for, as I went to bed, I heard sobs in the next room. I listened. No, there was nothing. But as I got into bed again I felt sure that I heard regular sobbing. It must be Mabel. For a moment I hesitated. After all, it was her grief, and it would be impertinent to interfere. It isn't decent to interfere with people; that's why one lets them suffer. But after a moment I couldn't bear it, jumped out of bed, and, in my dressing gown, went into Mabel's room. It was quite dark, and only as my eyes grew used to the darkness did I see that the bed was empty. She was not home yet, and a sort of terror came over me in the dark, so much so that I thought I could still hear the sobs. I stayed there for a moment. I glimpsed in the middle of the bedspread a pair of muddy boots which Mabel must have flung down there. It was horrible, this suggestion of neglect. She didn't care whether her muddy boots lay on her bedspread, and, though I laughed at my illusion, I was horrified, as if this queer thing were true, as if still I could hear her crying, far away in some secret region of my own sympathy.

But I didn't think much more of Mabel, as I went to sleep. The morrow was too exciting. Vera received me in a small flat in Gerrard Street, which comprised a hall, as large as a boot cupboard, a bathroom, and a large bedroom. She received me there. "I hope you won't mind having tea in the bedroom," she remarked, quietly, "that's the only room I use." I did not reply; her quiet brutality frightened me.

She was as curious as I had hoped, embarrassingly curious. So, as we sat down to tea, I grew blunt.

"How did you come to take up this life?"

"Well, I had to make a living. I was a governess in an English family in Rome. My employer took a fancy to me. So did I, by the way. He was a nice fellow. That started me, for I got found out. There wasn't much chance of a good reference, so I went gay." She smiled. She had ugly little teeth. "It seems so long ago," she said, sentimentally. "He set me up in a flat on the other side of the Tiber. Happy days!"

"But," I gasped, "you don't seem to have anything against the man who . . . who, after all, was responsible."

"Why should I? One has to make a start. I wasn't likely to get married, and this is quite as good (try the crumpets) as work in an office. You don't have such a fine time yourself, do you? What are you? Bank? Insurance?"

"No. I'm secretary to a novelist."

"Oh, how sweet that must be! They have such lovely ideas, don't they?"

I giggled, thinking of *The Rose of Yesteryear*. She misunderstood me and smiled pallidly. "With a face like yours, I suppose he's after you? You straight girls, I know. You're straight, but only because you keep about a quarter of an inch off the crooked. Right up to the limit."

"No, she's a lady novelist."

"Oh, how dull! I hate women. Don't you?"

"No. Why should I?"

"They all scratch one another's eyes out and go after one another's men."

"Well," I said with a certain solemnity. "I shouldn't think you, of all people, would have to thank men for much."

"Oh, I don't know. They aren't bad. They pay."

"But you can't love any of these men, can you?"

The large whites of her eyes grew larger. "Love 'em! I don't know what you mean. A man gives me money—I love him."

I was afraid of growing sentimental, so would not discuss

love, and asked whether the men who came to see her were very repulsive.

"Well," she said, judicially, "one has to take the rough with the smooth. One gets all sorts—some sober, some tight. You wouldn't believe it, but there are lots of men who have to get tight before they can go on the razzle. Lots of men are moral, you know, and they can't get shut of their morals unless they get tight."

"Dreadful!" I said. "A drunken man!"

She smiled. "Drunk or sober, they behave much the same in the end. When they're tight they pay better, because they're feeling grand and want to show off their money. Of course, they're troublesome, in a way. They make a row sometimes, and one can't afford rows in this business. The landlord daren't allow it. Or they may break something or knock you about. They're a nuisance, really."

I stared at her, this little, pale, quiet, respectable-looking woman, talking of her clients like a stockbroker. She was quite unconscious of me.

"The old ones aren't bad," she murmured, as if to herself.

"Oh," I said, and she noticed my shudder.

"Well," she said, "they've got their points, you know, and don't give much trouble unless they're fanciful. There are only two sorts—the funny ones and the sloppy ones. If one talks to them about one's childhood, they always like it; it makes them feel up-to-date. The good business I've done by remembering the Queen's Jubilee! I was five then . . . well, you wouldn't believe it. I'm thinking of learning a bit about Gladstone and Disraeli."

I laughed. Her matter-of-fact way amused me; I was feeling easier with her, so I said: "I suppose, all the same, you often come across a nice young man."

She looked at me half contemptuously. "Young men?" she said. "Anybody can see you're not on the game. Young men, most of 'em, have no money. And the fuss they make. Full of high spirits, want you to go to dinner at a place where the band's fairly howling. Then on to a music hall where there's another band. Then to supper. Then they make

you dance for three hours at a place where there's a band that's still louder. And then, when you're about crumpled up, you've got to be cheery and make them realize that you never loved until you met them, because they're different." She sneered. "Different! They all want to be different, and they're all alike."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I suppose I oughtn't to question you. Are you sorry sometimes that you took up this life?"

"One's always sorry for what one's done, I suppose. One man lives in Devonshire and wishes he lived in town; if a fellow's a doctor he always seems to wish he was an engineer. We're the same. Still, it's better than being an old maid."

I did not reply, for I wondered whether I agreed with her. It was impossible for me to imagine myself as an old maid, though lots of women end like that. So Vera went on talking for a long time, and I wondered how she could make a living. She was not very pretty, slim, weak, very small-boned. She stooped a little, and did not look healthy. It was, I suppose, those immense light-brown eyes; I saw now that they were light, rather like topazes set in white enamel. They made her look humble, sorrowful. She appealed. I was sorry for her already, I don't know why, for she was cheerful enough, talking of theaters, light music, days on the river. I thought it was because she suggested a secret. She seemed bruised, or indecisive, or faintly disappointed. Later I asked her whether she was unhappy. She denied it, yet I couldn't believe her. I came to think that she was unhappy without knowing why, and grew still sorrier for her. She was all softness. When I pointed this out she replied:

"Oh, I'm not so soft as you think. A cat is soft until you try to hold it. I know what you think. You wonder how I manage men. Well, of course, you're straight, and so you don't know. I'm a little thing; they like it. I look as if I'd been knocked about; it makes them want to knock me about some more, and they're willing to pay for it. Men like being beastly to women; it makes them feel big and strong; it flatters them. Or if they're sloppy themselves, they get still

sloppier. A man gave me an extra pound the other day to make me laugh. Of course, I laughed. It was worth it."

As the afternoon passed I told her a very little about myself, of course hiding my origins. I couldn't be quite frank, and let her think that my father was a shopkeeper in the country. This suddenly revealed her dreams. I didn't realize she had dreams like the rest of us.

"I suppose I'd like to be straight and fall in love with a man, and have a nice little house in the country, with two children, not more, and a dog." She looked out vaguely from those immense eyes. "I shouldn't mind if he was poor, and I'd never flirt. Of course, if I could marry a rich man that I didn't care for, I'd have lovely clothes. I'd dress in the Oriental style, at Poiret's. I'd like to have a green dress with the top crossing over from right to left, with a draped skirt. I'd flirt a good deal, of course, but I wouldn't do anything wrong."

"You'd have a lovely house?" I said, humoring her.

"Oh, a lovely house," she said, raptly. "I'd furnish my drawing-room in the Oriental style, you know, with some scent burning in a bowl, and a big divan, and lots of cushions, and curtains, and thick Persian rugs."

"That sounds very passionate."

"I'm as passionate as anybody. Of course, I'd have to be careful then. I wouldn't do anything wrong. I'd have lots of pictures. I'd like to have a picture I saw of crossroads and a lot of trees, and the moonlight shining through."

"And gallows at the crossroads?"

"No, I wouldn't; I don't think that 'd be at all nice. And I'd like to have a big dog, an Irish terrier, to keep me company and to prevent men talking to me in the Park. I'd call him Paddy."

I sighed. I was sorry for her. "Do you ever dream of these things?"

"Oh, often. I like to sit and dream and think that a rich man is proposing to me. He's not very nice to look at, of course, but he's frightfully rich. I sit and think him out. I dress him up in a suit of clothes I've seen on a dummy in

Bond Street, and the nicest nose and mustache I've seen lately. Only he's too fat and he's frightfully in love with me. Sometimes I make out it's like the old days, like the days of Charles II, and he goes down on his knees, and just when I'm going to accept him, with his money and all his castles, I remember somebody else. He's poor, but I'm very much in love with him. So I make a beautiful speech to the rich man and tell him that kind hearts are more than coronets."

"And then?"

"Then I send for the poor man and we go out together into the world. It's always bad weather, you know. I like a snowstorm best for that sort of dream, and we're so happy. Of course, we don't stay in the snowstorm. It ends in a little cottage."

"I wonder if you'll ever get your little cottage."

"One never knows. One gets it easier this way than by being in a shop and saying, 'No, ma'am,' and 'Yes, ma'am.' If I've got to make up to somebody it 'd better be to men. I've prayed to St. Anthony to send me a nice man, only that's silly of me, because, you know, St. Anthony only finds the things one's lost, and I don't know the saint who gives you what you want if you've never had it before. Do you?"

I smiled. "I don't believe in the saints, I'm afraid."

"Don't you? You should. One always gets what one wants if one prays for it, only it's got to be reasonable. I prayed because I couldn't pay my rent the other day, and, would you believe it, a man rang my bell by mistake and gave me ten pounds."

I left her at last. She was not at all the courtesan of fiction, neither flaunting, nor harsh, nor in any way ashamed. She accepted her life as calmly as does, I suppose, the waitress at the A B C. Different jobs, that's all. And I suddenly asked myself, as I went along Marylebone Road: "Is she any worse off than the waitress at the A B C? than I? She's outcast by her occupation, I by my poverty. She wants a man to look after her; I want a man to marry me. Virtue? Yes, here's virtue." I laughed aloud. "It's funny;

for vice the world will give you anything you like, if you're clever, and for virtue it 'll give you nothing at all."

I found myself dreaming dreams different from those of Vera. She dreamt of security and respectability, because those were not in her world, and I, established, safe in my own class, dreamt of vice. Vera was right. A doctor always wishes he'd been an engineer. But a doctor was quite as well off as an engineer, and was I as well off as Vera? My dream denied it, for I saw myself now at the famous Hotel Vesuvius, seated at a little table, before me a glass of crême de menthe. (I wasn't very debauched yet.) I was wearing a flame-colored evening frock without a back; my arms were bare except for a bead shoulder strap and for a fatal golden snake with ruby eyes, coiled above the elbow. Light from the chandelier, abundant but rosy, and merciful. Other tables all about me, and other women, big-breasted as cockatoos, or thin, dark, and snaky, and little women with minxish faces and fair hair. Before me a large man in evening clothes, rather coarse, say the proprietor of many cinemas, wearing on his little finger a diamond as big as the Koh-i-noor. In my dream I said to my partner: "Bob, it's late. Send for the car."

I met Mabel on the stairs; I had never seen her face so drawn, her eyes so starting. She grasped me by the arm, trying to explain, and failing.

"I don't want to talk about it . . . but it's driving me crazy."

"What is it? What is it?" I asked.

She was shivering with cold. "Don't let me go. I must see him to-night."

I could hardly understand. What did she want? I took her into my room and tried to make her comfortable, though there was no fire. I put a blanket over her, and she lay there, quiescent for a while, while I pretended not to notice her, changing my blouse and ordering my hair. Suddenly she said:

"You're very kind to me, Miss Trent." She was collected now. "I'm sorry if I've been silly, only sometimes it's too

much for one. One can't live alone, and men drive one mad." She paused. My mind was so full of my conversation with Vera that I replied:

"The women who are . . . on the game, they seem to manage men."

"Yes," she said, "they're all right. They don't fall in love. Never fall in love, Miss Trent; it's not worth it. Better go on the game, as you say."

I turned my back on her, for I was still shy. "Sometimes I think of doing it myself," I murmured. (What had happened to Ursula Trent of Ciber Court? Can loneliness and poverty change one so?)

"Ah! we all do that," said Mabel. "If you did, I suppose I'd be envious." But at once she returned to her own preoccupation: "Thank you for being nice to me. I must go now." She stood up, looked into the glass. "Heavens! what a fright I look, and I've got to meet Jim." At once her face grew convulsed. She seized my hand. "He's given me the chuck," she said, in a strangled voice. "I wrote to him. I must see him again. Just to try." And with a sudden hoarse ejaculation that sounded like, "Oh, my God!" she ran out of the room, crying.

I am ashamed to write it down, but I did not think of her very much that evening. Could I go on the game? A sort of animal shrinking possessed me. As I sketched myself—frocks, methods, furnishings—I knew intimately that I wouldn't do it, that I couldn't do it, that something traditional held me back. One didn't do those things. To be touched! The idea made me sick. I despised myself for this weakness, so much so that when at last I went to bed I cried. I was weak; I couldn't bear to face my own life; I'd just muddle along like this and be an old maid.

III

I found myself awake, horribly awake. It was the middle of the night and I sat up with distended eyes. I could hear nothing, but I knew that something had suddenly aroused

me. As I sat for a moment, a cold sweat growing upon my face, I thought I heard something. No. I was wrong. A motor horn tooted. I heard the sound again. A sudden horror made me leap out of bed, and run, just as I was, in my nightgown, one hand against my breast, across the landing and into the next room. It was entirely dark, and I was so terrified that I nearly screamed as I felt on the mantelpiece for the matches and knocked over an ornament. At last I lit a match and held it up. Just long enough to see Mabel Thornton lying on the bed, half undressed. She lay on her side, quivering a little. I had time to see the long black handle of the kitchen knife that was buried in her breast.

I don't know how long I stood there, as if I was frozen stiff. A sort of helplessness was upon me, though I knew that she was not dead. It sounds so easy to go up to something mortally hurt and handle it; but it's not like having it lying prepared in a white bed. Quite as suddenly my activity returned, and, with hands that ceased to tremble, I lit another match and then the gas. She had not moved; still she lay on her right side, propped up by the knife upon which she had speared herself. With a last shudder I slipped my hand under her right shoulder and, gathering both legs on my left forearm, slowly turned her upon her back. She neither moved nor groaned, but only quivered in my grasp, like a fledgling bird. I took the pillow away to keep her flat, and, with nervous care, slipped the edge under her left shoulder to relieve the heart. Then I felt helpless. Get a doctor, of course, but for one moment I felt a wild desire to draw out the knife. I couldn't bear to see that handle sticking out, and a little of the blade, upon that pale olive, smooth flesh. Hysterically, I wanted to tear out the thing that was killing her. Fortunately my nurse's training saved me. There was very little blood round the wound; obviously she had missed the heart. There must be hemorrhage in the lung; indeed, a little blood was already trickling from her mouth, and her pulse was getting faint.

I was quite cool now. Still careless of my costume, I ran

down to the basement, where Mrs. Witham slept. I had a lot of trouble waking her, and more in making her understand. I practically dressed her myself, and pushed her out. The only thing she said was, again and again: "Oh dearie me! That this should happen in my house." Except once, "I never liked that young lady."

When I went up again, Mabel was still alive; indeed, her eyes were open, and as she saw me she tried to say something. I bent down and listened, but her voice was only a rustle. I stood by her side in horrible helplessness. I could do nothing but only watch her agony. And it went on, this agony. I don't know whether she was in pain, for her features showed nothing, and the worst of it was that now and then she blinked as if to make me come to her, yet her voice was only that rustle. I had covered her up with a blanket, and could not look at that elevated point made under the woolliness by the knife. At last the doctor came, a sleepy, rather bored, dead-tired young man. After thirty seconds he rushed out of the house to fetch an ice bag. Agony! How long would it take him at this time of the night? I had a vision of Mrs. Witham peering in at the door, on tiptoe, as if afraid of waking Mabel, or as if in church, and whispering, "Did he take it out?"

I did not reply, and for a moment I saw her gloat over that elevated point under the blanket. I felt that she would never go away; she was as if fascinated. At last, half angrily, I motioned her to go. As she closed the door, Mabel at last managed to speak. I bent down, my ear to her mouth.

"Miss Trent . . . he gave me the chuck."

"Yes," I said, "I know, I know. Don't think of that; you'll be all right soon."

"He gave me the chuck," she whispered again.

I said nothing. What could I say? All these weeks, I suppose, she'd been trying to communicate to me all her anguish, trying to find sympathy. It can't be done; human beings are like ships flying the S. O. S., and hardly anybody ever reads the signal.

Again: "Miss Trent . . . never fall in love. . . . Flirt."

I was holding her hand. I bent down and very softly kissed her on the mouth. I found my eyes streaming. I remember seizing a handful of my nightgown and drying my eyes with it. When at last I could see her again, a new composure had come over her face. Already the jaw was dropping a little, but there was no expression in the revulsed, open eyes. I heard the doctor on the stairs, carrying the ice bag, swearing, I think. It was over. She was dead. I went over to the window, where, to my amazement, a pallid dawn was breaking in the grayness of the sky. Almost at once a shower began to fall, to fall at first gently, as the stepping of a bird, then more sharply, and at last decrepitating upon the zinc roofs. I thought, "A soul's gone through the rain."

Chapter VI

After the Inquest

I

THERE is something comic about inquests. Everybody's so grave over the incident that has made an end to the life Doctor Upnor called "merely a mood of matter." The jury, especially, is so funny; these solid tradesmen, rather fishy-eyed, some annoyed at being taken away from their business, most of them important because sharing in tragedy. I think they were very keen to view the body, though they tried to look judicial. I know that I heard one whisper to the others as they came back, that it was a pity such a fine young woman should end like that. Poor Mabel! Her last compliment.

But there are other elements, horrible elements. I hated the coroner, a little rat-faced man with whiskers. A starved little man, the sort of little man his wife has never liked. Mabel couldn't go to her grave quietly. The coroner wanted to know all about her.

"Her people live in Norfolk? Why did she leave them? Been in several situations? Did she lead a decent life?" He was considering the medical evidence. Everybody looked grave over that.

Mrs. Witham was bullied. "You say she never brought men to the house? Am I to believe you knew nothing of the intrigue the deceased was carrying on? With this Mr. . . . James Ellwood? Come along, my good woman, you must have known something about it."

"None of my young ladies have ever brought gentlemen to the house, sir."

"I'm not asking you that. I'm suggesting to you that you must have seen Mr. Ellwood sometime."

"None of my young ladies ever bring gentlemen to the house," she went on, obstinately. He dismissed her at last. Then he put me through it. "Did Miss Thornton confide in me about Mr. Ellwood? Had I seen the letters which had been found in the room of the deceased? Had she ever referred to suicide? Did she seem afraid of Mr. Ellwood? Had Mr. Ellwood ever threatened her?" I gathered at last that the coroner was trying to make a murder case against the young fellow, whom I could hardly bear to look at. The coroner returned to the medical evidence, worrying it like a rat. Mabel lived an improper life, Mabel wasn't virtuous, Mabel, etc.

It was horrible to see Jim give his evidence. He was a good-looking young man of about twenty-six, fair, rather short, but neat and muscular, well dressed in blue serge. He wore an air of self-complacency, tempered that morning by a nervousness with which mixed a little pride. He was being a hero. After all, the girl had killed herself for his sake. But I thought I would cry again when I saw how the hair sloped away behind his ears; Mabel had spoken of that. The dead hand had caressed that smooth, fair hair. The coroner treated him brutally.

"How long have you known the deceased?"

"Two years."

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"Didn't want to."

"You think it a proper thing for a man to have irregular relations with a girl he might marry?"

No reply. "You had broken off relations with her, hadn't you?"

"Yes."

"Did she threaten suicide?"

"Yes."

"That didn't change your mind, did it?"

Jim grew aggressive and twirled his little fair mustache. "Oh, well, sir, women always talk of suicide, but they never do it."

"You mean that many other women have said these things to you?" Jim half smiled. "And you didn't think the

deceased would, as you put it, do it? Well, never mind that. This is not a court of morals. Was the deceased a good girl when you first met her?"

"I don't know."

"Don't talk nonsense. Answer the question."

Jim was exasperated. "I don't see that it's got to do with the case," he said, sulkily. The coroner was embarrassed. He knew it hadn't, but he wanted to go on; to adjourn the case and have it all over again; to see his name in the paper; to have his remarks printed; to see columns of his case in *The News of the World;* to be a big man; to dress up as Justice Darling; to wallow in this mixture of sex and blood. But there was nothing to be done. I had heard Mabel groan and gone in at once; Mrs. Witham identified the knife. There was no chance to commit Ellwood for murder. All the jury had to do, after returning a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity, was to add a rider censuring Jim. We walked out together, I a little behind. We both went down Marylebone Road; as we approached the house of a dentist, I saw a pretty housemaid cleaning the brass plate. Then I found that I was gaining on Jim, for he was walking more slowly. He looked at the girl as he passed. What a look it must have been! She smiled. He hesitated, walked on. I could not bear to watch, but as I went up Balcombe Street I just had time to see him turn round and the girl wave the duster at him. I don't know whether he went back.

II

One might have thought that, after this, hatred of men would have overcome me, and that Mabel's last whisper, "Never fall in love," would have influenced me for a little time. That I should have resolved to be a workinggirl doing her duty to Mrs. Vernham, taking down her idiotic novels, basking in the radiance of her teeth, and affording a respectful ear to the doings of her committees. Instead of that I violently reacted from the horror of the week. This blood and agony, the beastliness of the gamecock for whom

Mabel had died, the ugly men, the dirty court, the luscious coroner, all that made me want amusement, change, color, anything that was just life. I broke into Uncle Victor's twenty pounds. I bought a new hat. When I'm depressed I always buy new hats; it does me a lot of good. This one was the dinkiest I'd struck for a long time—black patent-leather, the shape of a flower pot, fitting just over my eyebrows, and trimmed with monkey fur. I saw it in a shop in Hanover Street and immediately became a prey to ungovernable lust. I knew it wouldn't do for the summer, but I was past caring. It cost five and a half guineas, but I was crazy for it. I put it on right away and walked out, feeling different. I looked at myself in the shop mirrors, and didn't care a damn for anybody. I can't explain, but women know what I mean. Then I felt that I must live up to my hat, so bought oyster-gray gloves to go with my blue coat and skirt. Very expensive in peace time. As I put them on I observed my hands; they were all right, clean, but evidently hands that worked, therefore disgraceful. I must be manicured. I walked down Regent Street, feeling expensive, looking into the chocolate shops, scent shops, conveying by a glance that if I chose I would buy the lot. It was a bright March day, beautifully warm. At the Circus I bought a bunch of white narcissi from an enormous bundle of clothing which contained a little, old woman. I was manicured, at a place in Denman Street, by a nice girl. When it was done my finger nails looked like coral; I felt more expensive than ever and tipped the girl two shillings. In the evening I was crazy enough to take Monica to the Hippodrome. We dined together, and I had a little too much to drink. I thought I'd done with Monica, but her wealth fitted in with the mood of the day. When I got home, for the first time I passed Mabel's door without a qualm, and went to bed. I didn't care a damn for anybody.

III

Something of this mood must have percolated next day to Philip Vernham, for he was intelligent and sensitive. Or

maybe he noticed my hat, when he came in about tea time. He probably thought it homemade, but fetching. Men are fetched by our clothes without knowing it. They get a general effect of us, and when we wear anything new, if they notice it, they think we've put it on to please them. They are unimpressed, but flattered.

"I hope that inquest didn't upset you, Miss Trent," he remarked, sitting on the table and dangling his legs.

"It did, rather," I said. "But what's the good of thinking of these things! One's got to live."

"Yes," said Philip, espousing my mood, "and life means love."

"I suppose so," I muttered, "if it comes one's way."

"It comes everybody's way, even if they're not pretty." I did not reply; his gaze embarrassed me. "Only some people are too cowardly to take it when it comes."

"Well," I said, "there are all sorts of risks, aren't there? Supposing one cares for somebody that doesn't care for you. That's pretty hard."

He smiled and gently slid off the table, murmuring: "That 'll never happen to you, Ursula." He had never called me Ursula before, and, in my perturbation, I did not resist when he took my hand. "You're lovely," he whispered. Then, unresisting, I found him take me in his arms and kiss me. I didn't want to resist. Love him? No. Like him? Yes. It pleased me to see in his eyes, as they opened, the veiled gleam that expresses surprise . . . as if a man did not expect to find in a caress the pleasure he has garnered. He held me so for a long time, kissing me again and again, not only on my mouth and neck, but on my closed eyes. It was so tender, that last caress; when I received it, I realized that he attracted me. So, half amazed, for a moment I rested my cheek on his. Never before had I done this to a man, and my slight abandonment delighted him.

"Look here," he said, releasing me, "we can't talk here. Aunt 'll be back in a moment. Come out and have dinner to-night?"

"All right," I said. "Where?"

"Cazzarino's. You know, in Oxford Street. Shall we say eight o'clock? Ask for me and . . . No, I'll be waiting for you in the lobby."

IV

If I had not been so busy that afternoon I might not have gone, for I should have had time to think, but Philip had wasted my time, and Mrs. Vernham had left behind some typing which she considered urgent. Heavens! What a mess I made of it! It wasn't so much that I was looking forward to the evening, as that I was disturbed. Anyhow, I distributed h's where j's were required, and even f's. I was quite impartial. How I hated the stuff, and hated Mrs. Vernham! I didn't finish till twenty past six, and almost ran home. Everything happened: No hot water; the left glove of my only clean pair lost. Found at half past seven. No taxis in Marylebone Road; bus 13 again; it makes one bitter. The hustle helped, for I didn't know what I was going to. Obviously, some time in the taxi, driving home, he was bound to kiss me. It's queer, anticipating caresses; they're sweet and terrifying in advance, and when at last one receives them they're never what one expected; sometimes they're better.

I got to Cazzarino's at two minutes to eight; for a moment I stood in the lobby among the palm trees and the bead curtains, terrified. My fault, of course, being early. It was horrid to stand alone in a public place, with waiters rushing by, shouting "*Coupe jacques! deux!*" and again "*Boum! truite meunière!*" But at once he stepped toward me. He was there. I ought to have known him better. He looked charming in evening clothes, a shade shorter than me, waxen white against that dead-looking black hair. His close-set eyes were half surprised, as if happy and afraid. So much flattery in a glance.

"I'm so glad you've come at last," he said. (Charming flattery. I was early, but he conveyed that his impatience had brought him here still earlier; yet he did not say so.)

"This way." He pointed to the stairs. As I followed

him he turned to say, "They have peaches here, peaches in March."

I laughed. I didn't quite know where I was going to, for I had never been to Cazzarino's. While waiting in the lobby, I had seen the dining hall, a very large room, half the wall space covered with mirrors in gilt frames. A painted ceiling, much light, a vase of flowers upon every table, and many people, only a few in evening clothes, a glimpse of a large foreigner with a mustache like Old Bill, and of two fair girls in low-cut frocks, leaning across and talking to each other. We passed the first floor. Here was a big empty room where Freemasons and debating clubs sometimes meet. The other floors looked strange. A corridor had been cut through, and so many doors fitted that it looked like a scene upon a stage. Puzzled, as he threw open a door marked 6, I walked into a narrow, brightly lit space. The door closed behind. Quite speechless, I saw that I was in a little room with walls covered in horrible rose-patterned paper. In the middle stood a table laid for two, with a large basket of fruit in the middle. Two chairs, a small table, an old red-plush sofa. That was all. The window, I later found, gave upon a mews. At present it was shrouded by two curtains of red plush. The strange shape of the room puzzled me. It was about ten feet by ten, but the ceiling hung enormously high. It was like having dinner in a lift shaft. I found out only much later that three floors of Cazzarino's, once rooms for entertainments, had been converted into these little hutches of obscurity and emotion.

I was in a private room. A touch of fear and a wave of excitement came over me. A private room! The jokes of the past entered my mind. This was life, Soho, the chorus girl, all that sort of thing. But wasn't it a bit? . . . I felt doubtful. I felt a Trent. Why didn't he take me to the restaurant? I grew angry at being, in a way, trapped. But just as I was going to speak there was a knock at the door, and there entered (for Philip had said, "Come in") an amiable and very stout Italian waiter, with a wine list bound in red.

"Let me see," said Philip, "what would you like to drink?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Well, what about a little fizz?"

"That would be very nice," I said, automatically. What could I say? And I love champagne.

"Dry or sweet? Now, Ursula, be a man and say dry."

I laughed. "All right, dry." Oh dear! I ought to say I wanted to go home, and now Philip was ordering liqueurs to follow coffee.

"Yes, benedictine," I said, "or kümmel."

And Philip added, "Send up the bottle, not the thimbles you call glasses."

"Yessir," said the Italian waiter, very Englishly, obviously having practiced this reply.

"Look here," I said.

"Yes, wait a minute, I can hear the *hors-d'œuvre* coming."

"Yes," I said, worriedly. "I know. But why aren't we dining in the restaurant?"

"It's full up. Didn't you see?"

Certainly it looked full up.

"Won't you sit down?" He pulled up one of the chairs. "Have a cigarette, so that you may smoke while you're having *hors-d'œuvre*. That's frightfully fast." He made me laugh. I couldn't help liking him. And the *hors-d'œuvre* came up at once. I was eating anchovies before I had made up my mind to go. I still wore my hat and cloak. Philip was tactful enough not to suggest that I should remove them. So I'd done it. Couldn't turn back. I was silent, but just as we started on the red mullet, it is evidence of strained nerves that a limerick, heard at the hospital, passed through my mind.

I giggled aloud, but Philip failed to extract the reason from me, for the limerick had made the affair funny. Nothing can be both funny and fatal. At least, one thinks that. So I determined to enjoy myself, and drank the dry champagne like an Arab lost in the desert in an oasis sups the water from the well. He was not frightening me. Now he talked a little about himself, his ambitions, his desire to build bridges and dams that would make Sir John Aird and

Sir Benjamin Baker envious. He made the engineering craft interesting.

"Civil engineers get all the fun, really. The mining people are only up against trifles like subsidences and drainage. The electricals never seem to get beyond a big dynamo; but we see our bridges go up to heaven and our roads push out like snakes. It's the real thing. One can get hold of one's work as one can of a woman one loves. Now don't say you won't have any more fizz; I assure you it's the goods. Just a spot!" I weakened, feeling rather vague. When the *pêche Melba* arrived, my will being completely released, I said nothing as another bottle of Mumm arrived. Then Philip fell under the sway of another mood. It seemed that life was so unsatisfying to a lonely man.

"There you sit," he said, in a veiled voice, "so lovely, a picture of beauty to make a man blink, and I'm entirely happy. It's nine o'clock, nearly. In a few minutes, perhaps, I must open the door of this temporary paradise to take you home. We'll have been ships passing in the night. What a pity!"

My eyes blurred. I felt so sorry for him that I emptied the glass, still mysteriously full.

"Nonsense!" I said, unsteadily. "We could see a lot of each other if you want to."

His blue eyes looked sorrowful and he leaned toward me. I thought he was going to touch me, and shrank half away, half toward him. But he did not. Still he considered me with those sad blue eyes; his melancholy grew, as, over coffee, we smoked in silence. I looked at him furtively. Yes, he was very good-looking. Oh, I know that women pretend that they don't care what a man looks like if he's got strength, as we call it, or character, but I know better. Who shall resist lips carved in marble? Soft eyes and level brows? I was sorry for him. As I got up, rather carefully, to take off the hat that worried me, I was sorry for myself. I flung my hat down on the occasional table, and there stood for a moment, saddened by the temporary quality of life. I felt so warm and light now, but in a few

hours, as he said, or was it minutes, we'd part. I couldn't bear it. Tears formed in my eyes. Almost at once he was by my side and I was in his arms. "Darling," he whispered, "what is it? What makes you unhappy?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, I do . . . and there's only one cure for that." I was too tired to ask what was the cure for the pain of the world. I was content to stand there for a moment in his embrace, and to give my lips to his consoling kisses. I was comfortable and safe. I liked to feel about me this male grasp. What could harm me within such a ring?

"I love you," he whispered.

I did not reply. I don't think I quite believed him, but I liked to think I did.

"Since the first moment I saw you," he muttered, "I've loved you."

Still I was passive in his arms, and he construed rightly this passivity. I didn't care what happened. His voice still rang in my ears.

"You too . . . you cared?" Again he kissed me. I was unendurably weary, careless. I just didn't mind. Then I found myself weeping, softly, and he didn't seem to care.

V

How did I get home? I did not brood over what had happened. Though it was not quite twelve o'clock, I stood for a moment in my room, weary beyond description, not unhappy, not happy, uncertain of my own regrets, dimly aware that never again would things seem the same. I was too tired to think. I went to bed with my stockings on. I slept as after a long day's hunting. I was like an exhausted animal, and only habit woke me up at half past seven, made me perform my usual tasks, washing, dressing, breakfast, going to work. I was perfectly normal, and Mrs. Vernham found no fault with me.

The reaction came only in the afternoon when suddenly my hands fell from the machine and I asked myself with

grave calm: "What have you done? How did you come to do it?" I could not answer those questions then, but now I know women better, and I suspect that any man can wed any virgin, any lover conquer any wife, if he can discover "her moment," if he can read the index on which is recorded her emotional zenith. In a muddled way I put down my folly to the champagne, which was silly, and told myself that I couldn't have done such a thing but for the excitement created by Mabel's suicide. I know that sounds absurd. One might think that such an example as that would have warned me off entanglements, would have made me run, terrified, from any man who approached me. That is not so, for there lies a magic in horror; the victim is dramatic, interesting. One feels small and undistinguished by the side of her who loved so much that she died for it. How wonderful it must have been! How profound must have been the spell laid by love! And so one seeks the fatal spell; one offers oneself to the enchanter; one would suffer, too, if only one might enjoy a thing so good that one dies for the loss of it.

After a time a new feeling came to me, and this was disappointment. Mabel died for love. Was that all? It came to me as a horrible revelation that either Mabel or I must be abnormal. Was that all? That brief struggle? That fear? That sense of removal from self-control? I didn't know myself then. I had not learned that through the body passion can disembody, parallel for all of us the feat of levitation which the tranquil fakir performs, as, without seeming effort, he rises into the air. No, I had quaffed no elixir. I knew only shock. I felt defrauded. I was ashamed of myself because I had not lived up to my dim expectations of delight. "Is that all?" I asked myself, again and again, without knowing that this is the cry of every woman who stretches out her hands for love and finds only a lover.

But of one thing I was not ashamed, and that was of what I had done. I had given myself, yes, and outside marriage. Well? That was all. I didn't grow sociological; I didn't argue about the evolution of morals; I was tempted to look

upon this as an accident which would not be repeated. Inwardly I was very glad. You may say I was not pure-minded, but if you say that you don't understand the feminine attitude, how it is haunted by the fear of the unknown, how modesty shrinks and longs to be destroyed, how greatly one desires to throw off ignorance, how an unconscious, a nameless impulse drives one to respond. We are different in this from young men; they, too, are modest, curious, stirred, but they have confessed it to me, they suffer from wilder impulses, from the instinct to aggression and to conquest for its own sake. That is why, so often, men pursue women who inspire them with no desire. Their vanity, their lust for power, their habits, their hostility to other men who possess, did possess, or may possess those women make it imperative that they should conquer. That is why they take us and throw us away. Every man would have his harem and other men for his eunuchs.

The idea that I wasn't a pure girl, or a pure-minded girl, or whatever it is, did occur to me. I must meet Philip again. I thought, "He won't respect me as he did." Which shows how young I was; now I know that men don't respect women when they love them; they wouldn't be so cruel. If I had said, "He'll desire me less," I'd have been right. Pure-minded! I've had ten years in hospitals, government offices, manicure shops, and smart circles, so I'm coming to think that there's no such thing as a pure-minded girl. If we set aside the very ardent (these are very few), if we leave out the sleepy, oppressed girls, who are half quiescent and also in the minority, I feel that the great mass of girls does not correspond with the magazine conception of purity. The magazine girl, who loves within the limits of the conventions, doesn't exist. When she is confronted with the situation brought about by her own impulses, when she must either give herself or refuse herself, she discovers herself as either drawn, larky, or frightened. Fear may hold her back, but purity! No! At least, I've nowhere met the condescending lily who practices the lofty gospel of the Victorian novel.

I know this all sounds queer from me, the girl from the

counties, from those counties where people never talk of these things, where they do them only in a hard, mechanical way, where women either forgo passion or indulge in it as a spiritless pleasure. I let myself go because I was clean-minded, because I wasn't hemmed in by false modesties. No tradition held me back. I think I can say, parodying Dowson:

"I have been faithful to thee, Purity, in my fashion."

VI

Still Philip did not come. Did I want him to? I didn't love him. Or was this love? I had thrown myself away, and now we must meet on a different footing; I still had the idea that he would respect me less; but, no, it wasn't quite that. I was still child enough to want the respect of men, but what I feared was more complex: he would still want me, and I didn't want him, not exactly; or he might want me no more. I'd read in novels of these things, and in advance pride was offended. I wished him to love me and not to love me. Already, and still innocent, I was asking of men what all women ask of all men—too much. He was to be a ghost and a material being, the past and the future, a memory and a hope. We ask a lot of men, and, because we never get it, we always ask it of other men.

But all that didn't alter the fact that sometime that day, no doubt, he would come to me. I would hear his footsteps and I would bend over the typewriter, careless and watchful. Then? Then a kiss upon my bended neck. I would leap into the air, saying, "How dare you!" thus expressing with dignity maidenly revolt. Life might be like novels. But I was discouraged; dignity would surely be out of place. What was done was done, and was I so sorry?

In fact it didn't happen quite like that. I did hear Philip's footsteps behind me as I bent over my typewriter, and so remained, my fingers on the keys, careless and watchful. Nothing happened. He did not kiss my bended neck. I felt myself theatrical in that pose, important, frightened,

and flattered. Still, nothing happened. I could feel him behind me, I could hear him breathe. Was he nervous? Ashamed of himself, perhaps? Seeking to make amends? Then offense overwhelmed me because I was not insulted by his impertinent caresses, because attraction did not master his remorse. I put this psychological situation more simply, "He can't want me much."

Softly he came to my side, dragging with him a chair. He took my hands off the keys and looked into my eyes with an air of gentle merriment. He did not speak, but in each palm laid a kiss. It was so moving, this little act of adoration, that instinctively my fingers closed about his chin. It was very sweet, and soon after I let him lift me from my chair, take me upon his knees, kiss me. I thought I loved him, and knew I did not, but already he had the liberator's authority; he was the accomplice of my release.

"You're beautiful," he murmured, and closed about me harder arms. A sort of urgency in his caresses frightened me. A new instinct warned me that now I was delivered to him, and a new caution told me that this room was dangerous. How far already I had progressed! Without desire I was already seeking safety. And it ended like that; there was no explanation. There was no "Are you angry?" There was no beautiful forgiveness, followed either by a pure and redeeming life, or by a rush into the wild excesses of the girl who has nothing more to lose. Instead we merely met at six o'clock, walked in the Park, dined together publicly, went to a music hall. At half past eleven he said good-by to me in the dark passage at Balcombe Street. He had been charming; had attempted no more than I would consent, had fed me, amused me, afforded me society, made me feel in the restaurant that I was a good-looking girl accompanied by a good-looking man, and that those two hens in the corner envied me. I saw them looking at Philip; their admiration made me value him. Suddenly I understood Mabel, and wondered whether only the attractiveness of Jim to other women had made her love him so consumingly. With precocious perversity I wished that Philip already

might threaten unfaithfulness, so that I might combat his infidelity.

I say all that now, who am a woman who has loved and observed men in relation with herself, and many other women, but how crude I was! How I believed him! How I dismissed Mabel's misery by telling myself that Philip was different. We always think that our men are different. Now I must dig into those old, veiled emotions to attain this clarity I am trying to impart to these pages. There lay so much passion then under my coldness that I didn't understand myself; now that my mind is cooler, I marvel at my lack of sagacity.

One doesn't know what one does when one's a young girl. It is as if one was an instrument with another holding the handle. I didn't want to go to Cazzarino's again, but when, as we parted, he asked me to dine there again the next night, I hesitated only a moment. I clearly realized that if I went I could no longer plead accident; nothing that happened now could alter the past, but if I went I could not say that I was without guilt. Suddenly I remembered once more that "There was a young lady of Ghent," and burst into sudden laughter, which I had to stifle for fear of waking Mrs. Witham.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"Oh, at everything! So as not to cry."

He was holding me in his arms. "You'll come?" he whispered.

"All right," I said, "if you want me to."

VII

The ardor of men is a strange thing. It rises so swiftly, and as swiftly subsides. I think we soon misunderstood each other, we two, and I wonder whether men and women are not joined by their misunderstandings. By failing to understand they gain an incentive to achieve unity, and this precipitates them into one another's arms. After a few weeks I was quite sure that I must at first have made a mistake.

I told myself that I was in love because I had discovered pleasure. A new desire to own him entirely came to me, not that in cool moments I had illusions as to the depth of my fondness, but because Philip afforded me a new contentment and I wanted to secure myself against loss. I wanted to marry him. I did not suggest it; his lightness made me suspect that he would give me up as easily as he had taken me. Phrases he let drop evoked a long life of adventure; he was thirty-five, and confessed to a first affair at fifteen. I think that was the only one I was jealous of, because that was the sacrifice of his innocence. I felt it rather unfair that I should have given him mine, and he have so long ago offered up his own. The intervening past mattered less.

It was, I think, this sense of injury, this desire to blot out his past, that awoke in me feelings of which I thought myself incapable. We had a scene one week-end, when we went away together and stayed at an inn in Sussex. I watched him while he shaved. A sudden hatred arose in me as I grew aware of the virility expressed by this harsh, dark stubble that I could hear crissing under the razor. He made faces in the looking-glass. He smiled contentedly as he stroked his smooth cheek. He looked self-complacent. I was unjust. I waited until he had finished and was drying his face. Suddenly I said:

"You don't love me."

He looked at me, surprised. "What's the matter, darling?" he asked.

I was furious. There was something matter-of-fact about this "what's the matter, darling?" I felt that a husband would talk like that to a wife.

He went on, "Don't I make you happy?" He tried to caress my cheek.

I shrank away.

"You don't love me, not really. Only in one way."

He smiled. "Oh, you women! You always want to be loved in the other way. Passionately if we love you with our hearts, and with our souls if it's your smile thrills us."

He saw that I was going to cry and took me in his arms. Then, as he held me so, as I could feel the beating of his heart, I was conscious of that awful desolation that I call the sense of the provisional. Here we were, we two, as intimate as human beings can be, yet separate, yet doomed to drift away when the first hatred that men call passion had passed away. The desolation turned to anger suddenly. It mustn't be. It couldn't be. I'd gone too far to detach myself. He must be more mine, more wholly mine, and in a sort of rage I dragged his head down and covered that smooth, cold face with kisses destined to arouse in him no longer passion, but love. He submitted to me almost like a woman, and, for a moment, I had a sense of triumph when at last I saw him by my side, a half-smile upon the lips that mine had held. I was a conqueror malcontent with the completeness of conquest. I wanted his arms round me still. I wanted him never to be satiated of me, not yet knowing that all men turn away in their satisfaction, that all men burn that which they have worshiped, that men care only for a little time. So I pressed upon his lips caresses which he tolerated, wearied him, oppressed him, pursued him, instead of teaching him to pursue me, until at last he almost put me aside. I did not understand. I did not understand him until years later, when his memory was nothing more to me than the ashes of incense. He had wanted to play, and I couldn't play with him. I don't know how to play. No woman does until she's taught. We always invest all our money at the bank of Eros, and we are amazed when it suspends payment. So I didn't understand why rapidly he cooled, why to my new ardor nothing responded save a new languor. Another man had to come much later to say to me: "Women are queer. They seem to fall in love with us just about the time when we get sick of 'em." If I'd had wisdom then, I might have retained him for a long time, by being unexpected, cold, wayward. But, instead, I let him assume that role. I created him so by my simplicity.

I wanted to talk of him with the nice girl with the brown eyes who manicured me at Denman Street. I said something

about men being difficult. She was about to leave to get married, and she didn't agree. She said:

"Oh, well, of course, in some ways my boy's a cure, but I expect we'll rub along."

Yes, I expect she rubs along without much friction. She was so pleased, so certain. She was not sorry to leave her job, which she told me wasn't bad—twenty-five shillings a week and as much in tips.

"You see," she said, "when one's married it's not like being in a place like this. I hate being mauled about."

I laughed. "You mean that when you're married you won't be mauled about?"

"It won't be the same thing, will it? Let me see, you don't like varnish, do you?"

No! Brown Eyes wouldn't teach me what life meant. She was getting married, and everything was laid out for her. I was an adventuress, and I wasn't sure that I had secured the golden apples of the Hesperides. Gilt, perhaps. Well, it was too late to try to understand. I could only go on. For another month we went on like this, I becoming ever more inclined to reproaches, to wearisome demands for demonstrations for which Philip was not ready. He understood it all, and for his amusement used my ardor. It pleased him to be courted, though it wearied him, too. He was finding an adventure within an adventure. It began to tell upon my nerves, for I slept badly; so my work became more irksome, and I did it less well. Mrs. Vernham censured me, and I was rude. A general sense of strain entered the house. First Mrs. Vernham was administering dental criticism; then I would catch Philip behind a door, seize his cool hand, make him kiss me, and tell him not to be a coward when he begged me to be careful.

Then he went to Birmingham, on business, for a week. Instinct told me this was a pretext, that he was getting tired of me, that my demands oppressed him, that he wanted to cool me. He succeeded, in a way, for his absence and the sudden deprivation of society and amusements filled me with depression. I hated life. It was like running an endless

gantlet, with things hitting you as you went. I faced my situation then. I had committed myself with a man I didn't love; he had gained power over me with the help of nature; sometime he would resign that power. It was intolerable that he might, for that would mean a frightful isolation worse than the original. I could bear to be neither with him nor without him.

One morning Mrs. Vernham said: "My nephew has got a very good position in the Midlands. He is to be second in command at a big contractor's. Very nice at his age." She then faced me with a representative tooth exhibition, and added: "I was always scientific myself. I have made several inventions, but my father didn't want them patented because he didn't want me to put myself forward. You see, Miss Trent, we were so strictly brought up."

I listened for a long time to tales of her upbringing. He had gone. He had run away. I remembered Doctor Upnor. He'd run away, too. Did men always run away from women? Were we too much for them? Or was it something in me?

"Lady Beatrice laid her jeweled hand upon the head of the little child, and, pointing to the open door of the little church, said . . ."

Bending my head to an incomprehensible fate, I began to take down.

Chapter VII

Orange Sticks

I

"YOU *are* a caution," said the brown-eyed girl.

Perhaps I was. At least, I suppose it was in the nature of a caution to find relief in the loss of things it held dear. I was very miserable after Philip went. I missed my pleasures, dining with him, having this pleasant man to talk to, going to the theater, going to sleep with the feeling that something would happen next day. Of those who read this, all will not understand me. They don't know what it is to look forward only to a day of toil without anything in it that excites anticipation. Sometimes I wanted him, just him, his pleasant voice, his flattery; sometimes I tried to evoke him in a day dream. I nearly always cried a little during the reaction that followed this exercise. But I was a caution all the same. I was a caution because, mingling with my sense of loss was a sense of freedom. I was no longer bound. I could do what I liked, enter freely into a new slavery. I wanted nobody, but it was like the day when I was sacked from the hospital—I found delight in the idea of the possible entanglements to come. I did not tell all this to the brown-eyed girl, but I tried to convey to her this sense that nothing lasted, that one wanted nothing to last. She called me a caution because she didn't understand me. It was her way of summing up.

"I don't see what's bothering you," she said. "You've got a very interesting job, haven't you? I know I'd much rather be typing beautiful books than holding hands that look as if they'd been carrying coal. To say nothing . . ." She stopped. "And I don't know what you mean about

nothing lasting. I'm going to be married; that lasts long enough by all accounts."

"Don't married men ever come here?" I asked, with sudden sagacity, born, no doubt, of my talk with the Quaker courtesan. "And don't they grow confidential?"

"Oh, well," said the brown-eyed manicurist, whose name was Susie, "there are people who don't get on, of course."

"But you'll get on, won't you?"

"I expect so. Oh, sure to. He's different, you know."

I didn't inquire farther into the temperament of the young man who was different, like the others. Besides, I had my own troubles to think of. Mrs. Vernham's house was intolerable to me. I was madly bored with her form of literature; I was taking down worse and worse; I began to put down Lady Beatrice instead of Duchess Verena. I could have insulted Mrs. Vernham when, on a stage entirely decorated with teeth, she performed a play in five hundred acts entitled "Mrs. Vernham: Her Career, Resource, Ability, and Influence." I tried to explain to Susie.

"Well," she said, "if you don't like your job, why don't you get another?"

I said nothing. These hard-working girls, Susie, Mabel, they were so different from me. Here was another self-reliant girl, sure she could get a job, ready to face the world.

"How?" I said.

"How *does* one get a job? There are agencies, I suppose. Or one advertises in the papers."

"And suppose I didn't get a job?"

"Oh, you'll get a job right enough. Go down to the City and knock at doors, and ask if they want a typist." She smiled. "With a face like yours they will, even if it isn't for typing. There! You mustn't mind me. I've got coarse since I got engaged, and in a place like this men do say things."

Suddenly I grew clear. I was sick of my work, listening to Mrs. Vernham all day, and having to behave as if she were wonderful, smiling when she tried to be funny, being asked "whether this is quite clear," and presumably being

thought a fool if I didn't think it clear, being, in a way, the public, the dull, ignorant, bestial public.

"I don't know what you mean," said Susie, "but if you want to change your job, why don't you do it?"

"What can I do?"

"I don't know. Why not manicure?"

"I don't know how to do it."

"No more did I once upon a time. It's nothing. I'll teach you." I protested. "Oh, it pays. One way and another, you make anything up to three pounds a week, and you can have a bit of fun if you like. Men 'll take you to dinner and to theaters if you aren't standoffish. It's rather fun, really, and I'd like to stay on, but my boy won't let me." She smiled. "I wish he'd let me, but one likes a man to be jealous, doesn't one?"

The suggestion hung in my mind for some time, and I amused myself with day dreams. In those dreams I was looking very nice, in lingerie blouses, with my hair fluffed out, sitting on a little stool at the feet of a really nice sailor. I worked on his hands. Then he got troublesome, and I paralyzed him by putting in one hand to soak. He was very nice, nicer than Frank Coriesmore. He drove me home in his car and . . . well, I would let him kiss my hand if he was good. But I don't think I should have gone if Mrs. Vernham had not become more acid since the departure of Philip. She missed him, as I missed him, too, and yet we could not confide; we got to dislike each other. Nothing happened, but there was continual yapping: "Don't you know an interrogative wants a query mark at the end?" "'Bare,' meaning 'with nothing on,' is not spelled like 'bear,' an animal who's got plenty on." (Dental pause to allow me to laugh at the pun. No result.) "Really, Miss Trent, you must keep a pad and write out your mistakes each time on a sheet of paper. When there are enough of them we'll have them bound." Later I annoyed her by numbering my pages while she dictated. It put her off. Then Mrs. Vernham wanted me to come and take down one of her lectures in the evening, pointing out that it would be so interesting for me. I was

not attracted and refused. So, suddenly, a week later, I said to the brown-eyed girl:

"I say, were you serious about my going in for manicuring?"

"Why not? There's nothing in it. And now's your chance. I'm going in four days, and we haven't got a new girl, so far as I know. Porky'd have you all right."

I knew Porky. He was the proprietor of the barber's shop below, and took no interest in the conduct of the shop upstairs. He was elderly, very fat; once a day he came up, threw a detached glance at the curtained recesses, and went down again.

"But he wouldn't take a raw hand."

"Yes, he would, if I told him the tale. Besides, it won't be a tale when I've taught you."

"But . . ."

"Don't you worry. Porky doesn't talk much, but he knows all about this business. He'll like the look of you. Leave the rest to me."

And so it was. Porky merely remarked that anybody that Susie vouched for would be all right. Susie was splendid. I fetched her that evening at seven o'clock. We had dinner at the Eustace Miles Restaurant, and I took her home; she had brought her implements with her, and was so generous that she submitted to my unskilled practice on her rather charming hands. It was not very difficult. I wrote down the theoretical course, the succession of processes, and learned them by heart: "File the nails and never cut them; ask him if he wants them long or short, round or pointed. Never cut them too short, even if he says you are to, because if you do he won't come again so soon. Soak. Tell him to move the soap about in the water; men must play with something. Clear the half moon with a cuticle knife and trim with the cuticle scissors. But never cut the cuticle."

"Sometimes they're stained under the nail," said Susie. "That's a nuisance. Some say you should use the cuticle knife, but I'm all for an orange stick wound with cotton wool. Soak it in cleanser. Finish up with emery board under the nail."

I manicured Susie every night, three nights running, and finally was passed.

"I don't say that you wouldn't make a good carpenter," remarked Susie, impartially. "Fact is, you wouldn't be bad as a butcher, either. Still, if you don't overdo it, if you don't do more than trim a bit, if you keep off fancy work at the beginning, you'll do all right. Use your looks and they'll forgive you a lot."

II

I was very nervous and very pleased. I was so glad to have got away from Mrs. Vernham's, to have killed the memory of Philip. He wasn't brutal about it. He wrote me a charming letter from Birmingham, pointing out that a demobed officer must take the first good chance he could get, asking me not to forget him (like Doctor Upnor), and hoping to see me soon again. Yes, a beautiful letter. As I have said before, men who don't love you always write beautiful letters. I had no time to think of him, for it was rather shattering, this new occupation. It was not a recognized occupation, like millinery or nursing; it had a touch of the disreputable. This hand-holding, even for surgical purposes, was necessarily a little sentimental. I began like that, and I never grew as blunted as did Polly and Miss Merton, who had been in the business for years and treated hands as dispassionately as they would have feet.

There were two girls besides myself, one known as Polly, the other as Miss Merton. Polly couldn't have been called anything else; one couldn't have said "Miss" to her. She was such a Polly, with her rather round, rosy face, her bright little blue eyes, her tumbled, light-brown hair, her capacity for easy merriment. Polly enjoyed herself in the manicure shop; all day, at intervals, squeals of laughter pierced her curtain. Sometimes one heard her protest, "Oh, go home!" Pause, squeaks, scuffle. "Oh, Charlie, do give over!" Then, ferociously: "Chuck it, or I'll empty the bowl on you!"

Miss Merton was different. She was very pretty, dark-

haired, exceedingly sober. She had a Spanish look, and, knowing it, accentuated her type by wearing a red flower in her curly black hair. Nothing ever happened behind Miss Merton's curtain. Once or twice only I heard a warning "Now!" Mostly there was silence, and she repelled familiarity with splendid efficiency. Miss Merton knew what she was up to.

The first day was rather a racking affair. My first customer, just before lunch, was a round, fat, fair, middle-aged man, who would have been rather smart if he had not been wearing a frock coat. Something to do with cinemas, I believe. When I returned with my bowl full of hot water, absolutely terrified, and sure that I would cut him to the quick, he was sitting in the armchair, his square, hairy hands upon his knees, and these knees wide apart to give space to his stomach. His thick mouth was smiling amiably. Anyhow, he looked good-tempered. As I sat down, quaking, having drawn my curtain, my customer remarked: "I say, you're a good looker," and, without any hesitation, put both arms round me and kissed me. I was too surprised to resist. Then I struggled madly, without a word. I hated him. I dug my elbow into something soft, pushed as hard as I could. I wanted to hurt him. With a gasp he suddenly let me go and nursed his injured side, while I returned to my little stool, where I sat, trembling, my eyes averted, too weak to get up, and yet filled with the intention to run away. Then, to my amazement, he said:

"Hum! . . . She didn't seem to like it."

He wasn't angry. He was taking it naturally. I couldn't understand it at all. He held out a hairy hand. "Come on, get on with the job." Feebly I took his hand and set to work. After a while he began to talk quite amiably about the weather, a play he had seen, and had I been long at this job. He gave me no more trouble at all. At the end he tipped me a shilling.

That was the first specimen I collected for my Denman Street gallery. He was not an unusual type: brutal, but good-tempered, and not really unkind. That type kissed

manicurists as a matter of habit, without particularly wanting to, just as many men kiss girls in cabs as they drive them home from the theater. He even came again two or three times, and every time the same thing happened. At last he took up with Polly, who thought him delightful. They got on very well, and once I heard her cry out: "Give over, old squeezer! Do you take me for a lemon?"

I had seven customers that day, six of whom tried to kiss me. When the second one tried I grew quite clear that I wasn't going to stick this much longer, but as I found that I could stop him by telling him I didn't like it, after which he became fairly pleasant, I changed my mind. He, too, gave me a shilling. The others only gave me sixpence. By the end of the day I had learned that at Denman Street sixpence was the usual tip for manicuring, and that for another sixpence one had to put in a bit of overtime, as Polly said. The third seemed quite inoffensive at first, and began by admiring my hands, then the way my hair swept away from my brow, then the set of my ears. Then he illustrated on my ear the beautiful detachment of the lobe, and I twitched away. He kissed me by surprise on the back of the neck. I got up, rather angry; sixpence only. When the fourth man tried to kiss me I was getting used to it; he was another of the huggers. The fifth was like the third; he was progressive. The sixth man I forget. The seventh was very old, and persecuted me for half an hour to find out all about my present and past love affairs. At first I said I hadn't got any. Then, as he looked disappointed, I invented hard. He was frightfully pleased; his white beard bristled on his pink cheeks. He patted my hand when we parted and gave me half a crown."

"Well," said Polly, as she did her hair at five to seven. "How did you get on?"

"Oh, all right."

"Found the boys a bit trying, didn't you? judging by the way your curtain flapped about. But, there, I'm not one for interfering."

I confided a little of my experience to Polly, and she con-

firmed my first impression that men were either huggers or progressives, and that only once in a way did you meet a man who didn't try it on. If that one came regularly, you had to be jolly careful of him. He was a deep one.

"But do you mean to say," I asked Polly, "that every man who comes here thinks he's got the right to . . . well, to behave like that?"

"Of course he does," said Polly, casually. "Do you think he's going to waste forty minutes in a place like this unless he's out for a lark? If he's not out for hand-holding he has himself done downstairs while he gets shaved or has his hair cut. If he comes up here, it's because he likes it; and a man will have his bit of fun, won't he? Well, cheerio!" In a hoarse whisper: "I've got off with a staff major. He's taking me to the Pav. to-night. He's bound to have a pal; shall I get one for you?"

I refused. This getting off! Mabel had got off for good, poor Mabel! The Quaker courtesan, and Polly, everybody talked of getting off. Were we women created to get off? As the week passed at Denman Street, I concluded that getting off was indeed what women were created for. Some got off in marriage, others got off on the streets; we manicurists got off more superficially, giving kisses and no more for dinners and seats at the theater. It's a beastly life being a woman.

It wasn't altogether beastly, because I am what I am, and there hung about the manicure parlor an irresistible stimulus. It's disgusting to have a man persecuting you with caresses, but still it's flattering in a small way. Some were rather nice, and good looks matter so much to me that, on the fourth day, when a charming Australian put his arm round me as we got up, I only half resisted. Perhaps I was getting worn out; perhaps he was rather nice. Anyhow, I let him kiss me just once, and pushed him away. "There," I said, "be good." (I was already picking up the language.) As he tried to seize me again I hit him on the nose with the clothes brush and ran out of the curtained recess, laughing. I surprised myself, but my sense of self-contempt was not

so strong as it had been. Six months away from Ciber Court, my working life had made a change in my ideas.

It wasn't a bad place. A rough fellowship arose between us three. We'd always lie for one another if by any chance Porky came in and asked why So-and-so wasn't back and when did she go out for lunch? We exchanged references about the customers, too. This one was awful; that other was quite happy if you got him to talk about golf. There was very little rowdiness. Beyond some squeaking and some movement in the curtains it was quite a proper place. There was only one scene in my first month. The Australian came back with a friend, and, as I was engaged, went into Miss Merton, with whom he had grown familiar. I heard a lot of laughing, and grave reproaches. Just as I ushered out my customer, frightful screams came from Miss Merton's cubicle. Polly and I rushed toward the recess, followed by Polly's customer. We found Miss Merton in the grasp of the two men, who were practicing upon her a horrible torture: while one held her, the other scraped her hair off a much too high forehead and paraded a looking-glass before her eyes, compelling her to see herself at her most unfavorable.

We all shrieked, and Miss Merton became savage, kicking, and trying to scratch. Then, to my amazement, she addressed the man who held her down, and called him . . . But I can't repeat the word. She grew quite pale. "Let me go, you . . ." she remarked in a conversational voice. It gave him a shock. He let her go, and for a moment everybody was awkward. "Get out, all of you," said Miss Merton. She loathed us all. Her fury had exposed her commonness. She felt it badly, and for two or three days hardly spoke to us. The Australians came only once more and tried to make it up with two pounds of chocolate. Miss Merton was splendid. She went to the stairs, called down for the apprentice. "Dickie," she said, "here's a couple of pounds of chocolate for you." Then she turned to the Australians and said: "Is there anything else I can do for you to-day? Anything except manicuring, and I'll be charmed."

I couldn't help respecting Miss Merton. She was making such a successful struggle against her commonness. She came, I felt, from incredible slums, from a room where four or five people slept, and, animated by an amazing determination to rise, she'd fought her way into h's, fought it into cleanliness, fought it into clear, careful speech. She was engaged to the head clerk of an estate agent. Harsh and cold, she was making her way with fine courage, determined to be respected.

Polly was different, and much more charming. We became friendly one day, after lunch, when she came in rather breathless, undid a parcel, and showed me a pair of pale-blue artificial silk stockings. "Aren't they lovely?" she said. Her eyes were gleaming. "I do love blue," she said. I noticed for the first time that she mainly wore blue. I had been there nearly a month and once only had observed a horrible outbreak of seasick green. Then she returned to blue. Blue had a dream quality.

"If I was rich," said Polly, "I'd have everything blue. These were a present."

The remarkable thing about Polly was that she knew how to obtain such presents and yet prevent excessive familiarity. With splendid impartiality she allowed herself to be fondled by anybody who passed her curtain. She did it without vice, laughing, just like a friendly cat at an area gate who holds out to any passer-by a head to be tickled. Some people would have called her loose; in fact that apparent looseness was an evidence of her purity of mind. Caresses meant nothing to her. She didn't dwell on them, as do the somber unapproachables in whose mind the neighborhood of men creates response.

"I do love blue," she repeated. "I must put them on now. I can't wait." She took off her shoes and stockings, showing her feet and legs without any shame. They were pretty feet, but she didn't seem to know it; she was thinking only of blue. Again, some people may call her immodest, but this was an evidence of her perfect naturalness; she was not like the evading suggestives, who can't exhibit an elbow without

thinking that it breeds interest. She was a little round, rosy, pleasant animal.

"Clothes help a lot," she said, meditatively. "When I feel nicely dressed I don't get indigestion. Do you think Regesan is any good?"

"I've never tried it."

"Not really? It's about the only thing I haven't tried. It's advertised such a lot there must be something in it. But I do have a time. Pain inside! Simply awful!"

I couldn't help laughing. Her blunt innocence was charming.

"There's nothing to laugh about," she said, offended. "You'd have indigestion if you had nerves like me."

"What's given you nerves?"

"Oh, one thing and another," she confided. She was engaged to a young man whose picture I was shown, a young clerk, good-looking in a delicate way, wearing a large watch chain on which were fastened swimming prizes and masonic signs. She carried his picture in a locket round her neck, with a four-leaved shamrock on the other side. Some customer had told her that she carried with her luck and love. She repeated this to everybody, and repulsed the over-adventurous by pointing out that her boy was looking.

She had complicated troubles. Her boy was anxious to marry her at once, but, though she would not acknowledge it, she felt that they had been engaged too short a time, only two years. Her class instinct made her look forward to a normal time of trial of at least four years. Also, her father was a sickly pensioner, and her mother did washing at irregular intervals. So they depended upon her, and she felt responsible. She had some idea of setting them up in a small house where they could let lodgings, and she couldn't marry until she'd done it. Also there was the trousseau to get—a blue one.

"Oh, well, such is life," she summed up. One of her regular customers came in. They went behind the curtain, and soon there was giggling. When I saw her, later in the afternoon, all her troubles were forgotten. She was entirely happy, for

her customer had added to her collection a photograph signed by Gladys Cooper in her own hand. This accounted for occasional outbreaks of music from behind the curtain. When Polly was elated, while she manicured she sang. One heard:

"I want to go back, I want to go back,
I want to go back to the farm."

She was very out of date. Then she would be interrupted, one guessed how. The song would stop. "Don't be silly." In a warning tone, "Now!" Repression successful. Song resumed:

"I want to go back, I want to go back,
I want to go back to the farm."

She was a darling.

III

I began to acquire regulars. Regulars are rather a nuisance, for they expect to be dawdled over, humored when affectionate, and grow rather cross when they have to wait. On the other hand, they provide a certain income. Also, it's the thing to have. Every trade has its blue ribbon, and the manicurist has failed if every day one man does not gloomily wait outside the curtain, listening, with jealous vigilance, for unfaithful sounds. Thanks to my regulars, I was now earning just on three pounds a week and was accepting life with a certain degree of amusement. Some of the men were not dull; a few were attractive; but I still kept my rules and gave nothing consentingly, even to Mr. Wilby, my soldier regular, the most difficult of them all. I realized that I had escaped from Mrs. Vernham only into a life that would lead me to nothing much more precise. Excepting marriage, perhaps. Susie had got married; Miss Merton and Polly were engaged. It was, as Polly remarked, a good place in which to commit bigamy. But did I want to get married? I told myself I didn't, though, of course, I did. Marriage is the terminus for women; it's only less

final than death. I realized also that if I wanted to get married, I would much more likely achieve it here than in Mrs. Vernham's study. There, after all, I had found only Philip. What a fool I had been with Philip! I wonder whether he'd have married me if I'd held out. I suppose so. I suppose most marriages are merely evidence that the girl has held out, or that the man knew she would hold out. Did I wish I had married him? Well, in my present frame of mind I did, because I was thawing, was beginning to understand Isabel and her theory, "Get married, and then we'll see."

Just about then I had a difficult interview with Isabel. I knew what would happen, so had not told her what I was doing, but Mrs. Vernham told her I'd left her, and Isabel called at Balcombe Street, interviewed Mrs. Witham, who did not conceal my new occupation. I had to go and have tea on a Saturday afternoon. Isabel was furious.

"How can you be such a fool? I suppose you think you've done something clever? I suppose you think you'll get married in that manicure shop?"

"Well, one does," I replied, aggressively.

"Yes! To what sort of man? To the sort of man that gets manicured. I suppose you're doing it under your own name?"

"Yes. There's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Who's talking of shame? It isn't shameful, it's silly. So long as you were tucked away in Mrs. Vernham's back room nobody knew anything about you and you were all right. What's going to happen if you do marry? When later on you meet the men you have manicured?"

"Perhaps I sha'n't marry," I replied. "There are other things than marriage."

"Work!" said Isabel, sardonic.

"Not only work," I replied, and said more than I meant. "One doesn't need to marry to know men."

Isabel understood me at once. She seemed to detect some change in my features.

"Oh!" she said at length. "If that's what you mean!"

She grew embarrassed. She sort of gave me up. She no longer tried to get me out of the manicure shop, but said that I ought to go on the stage. I understood. Isabel wanted a conventional cloak for the irregularities she suspected. But she was not unkind to me, and it was she soothed mamma, who came up, weeping, offering forgiveness and an allowance to a daughter who grew more independent and more cruel as her mother wept more. Isabel made mamma understand that I'd better be let alone, and that all she could do was to fatten the calf in the hope that one day the prodigal daughter would return.

"I told her that if she went on trying to save you she'd drive you to the devil."

Isabel is as brutal as me in some ways.

Chapter VIII

Ding-Dong

I

I WAS getting used to the life. I liked these girls, whether evasive or flaunting. There exists a sort of physical attraction between women, greater than exists between men. What I mean is that men don't seem to mind the ugliness of their close friends; we tolerate it too, but seldom is a man affected by male beauty as we are by female beauty. Polly's bright blue eyes were a continual pleasure, and so was Miss Merton's Spanish air. Strange girl, Miss Merton. I never understood her; she would never intrust herself. One didn't know anything about her, except that she loved fancy-dress balls. Just then she left, suddenly, saying that she was going somewhere else, and I never saw her again. She was replaced by a girl called Hilda, who at once created some disturbance among Polly's regulars and mine. It was a nuisance, because in the manicure world the regular contracts a sort of marriage with his manicurist. No other girl invites him behind her curtain; it isn't done. She talks to him as to the husband of her best friend, amiably, but without invitation. The regular may have his nails done by somebody else if his girl happens to be ill or away, but it is a sign of greater virtue to let his fingers go until she comes back.

That is where Hilda proved troublesome. She was too pretty. She had the most perfect, honey-colored hair, water-gray eyes, a dead-white skin which made her thick mouth seem excessively red; her lips were always a little chapped, as if she were consumed by a fever. She had the most exquisite hands, small, shadowed in sepia inside the joints;

the sepia shadow recurred at the elbow joints. If I had been a man I should have wanted to kiss her in the somber hollow between arm and forearm. She was very small-boned, full-figured and erect. A strange combination of high breeding and slum environment. She always spoke with extraordinary care, never slurring a negative, being afraid of not talking properly. We wrangled at first when Mr. Wilby went to her because I was a quarter of an hour late after lunch, though I had made an appointment with him. Also, she borrowed my scissors without telling me. I thought Polly had taken them, burst into her cubicle, not knowing that she had a customer, and found her in his arms; obviously that's why there was no noise. Polly went for me. The row about scissors and bursting into other people's cubicles went on for two days, during which Hilda maintained an attitude of beautiful neutrality. The little beast, hearing what was happening, had slipped out of her cubicle and quietly dropped the scissors behind my customer's chair without his noticing. At least, I swear it must have happened like that.

Hilda was absolutely mobbed; she got so much work that some fell to Polly and me, which was satisfying but humiliating. This made me consider whether I was pretty, for I was not used to being eclipsed. But by degrees we settled down, thanks to a man called Lawrence Knighton. He practically settled the Hilda problem by becoming crazy for her and coming to be manicured every day. He was tall, rather dark, had nothing to do, and was, I discovered a little later, the eldest son of an Irish peer. I don't think Hilda encouraged him much; she was too cool and too careful. I caught a glimpse of them one afternoon through an ill-drawn curtain. He was sitting opposite the girl, who had just finished trimming his nails, gazing at her with an awful air of abasement. He tried to press her hand, which she withdrew, and so they stayed.

It's a funny thing, the helplessness of men before women when these know how to hold themselves in. So many were passing before me every day, men of all sorts—old men, feebly gallant or frankly disgusting; boys out for a rag; married

men, rather ponderous or inclined to confide their miseries; philanderers, anxious to take a little stimulus and not to entangle themselves too deeply; or a more physical type, going from shop to shop, seldom persevering, determined to find easy adventure. One gets to know men like that, because few can sit alone with a girl, hands touching, without confiding something of their hopes, disappointments, and vanities. One man, a queer person with moist locks, and (this was one of the minor horrors of my trade) moist hands, paid me a few cadaverous visits and gave me the following cadaverous lines. As I have said, I don't understand poetry, but I feel they are pretty bad:

TO URSULA THE MANICURIST

My hands she holds in her long brown hands,
So firm, so nervous, and pulsing through with life.
Those hands, I see them in their predestined strife
With Death the Riveter of the eternal bands.
Her hands the coverlet will pluck that day,
Reluctant and afraid their grasp to slack,
And as her thoughts grow dim they will go back
To all those hands she held when young and gay:
Fine hands that molded thrones or set out song,
Pale hands too weak to do aught but dry tears,
Fierce hands that slew a foe and knew not fears,
Gross hands that, clasping hers, would do her wrong.
But no hand will touch hers that once so many pressed,
On that day when all things from all things fade away,
When in the play of life she has no more to say,
And empty-handed goes to an unending rest.

That was the sort of thing I had to accept as a compliment. We had a tea party once, Hilda and Mr. Knighton, a stranger and myself. Everybody got familiar. The stranger kissed me, half unrebuked, while Hilda held away, with those marvelous water-gray eyes, the humble Knighton, who at last went down upon his knees and was allowed to kiss the sepia-touched fingers.

So far I had refused the perquisites of my trade, except that twice I went out to dinner and to the theater with Mr. Wilby, who behaved very well, even in the taxi going home. He merely sighed when I repulsed him, and said that he was a Jonah and girls didn't like him. I did not respond. I knew these tactics, and always expected trouble when a man said that nobody loved him or that he suffered from shyness. I think I lost him that way; I was not very successful then. There was a lack of yield about me. These trifles that men expect were not trifles with me. I can't play. I had a model before me in the shape of Freda, whose whole name was Frederika Watterdal, some sort of Swede, I believe, who was engaged, owing to the new business brought by Hilda. Freda was mainly pursued by a man called Mr. Higham, a very rich widower, who owned many restaurants. Freda was interesting, extremely tall, cool-looking, with an equivocal gleam in her dark eyes. She spoke very little, and then in a careless tone. She was chaffed about Mr. Higham, and merely replied, "Yes, he's old and not pretty." That was all. That was how she took life.

I believe that the attitude of Freda and the return of Philip altered my point of view. Philip discovered me by making a flying visit to London and, one morning, following me from Balcombe Street to the manicure shop. He then came in to be manicured. For a moment I was melted by his good looks, but I wouldn't speak to him. Beyond asking him whether he wanted them long or short, round or pointed, I would not answer him, though he explained at length the needs of his career and the impossibility of things going on forever, though they might go on at intervals. I refused to say good-by to him, though I took his tip. I felt a resentment against him, and it was not that he had deserted me; it was that he had waited two months to seek me out again. If he had come back three days after his desertion, forfeiting his career, unfaithful to me in his mind, but unable to resist me, I could have loved him. But I could not be the decoration of his week-ends. He must have understood this, for I never heard of him or saw him again. He left me frozen and de-

termined to profit by the lesson he had given me. The natural reaction, yes, I say natural, was that I suddenly flung myself into the trifling pleasures of the shop. He had made me so angry, had made it so clear to me that I'd been a fool with him, that I became a fool with others. For a fortnight I was seductive and careless. I did not resist, and I was successful. I think I saw all the revues of the day, with a different man by my side and a different hand holding mine. I was given presents, chocolates, gloves; I had too much to drink. Only, some secret tradition saved me from the most extreme of follies. There are limits that I can't pass; something won't let me. I can't play; I wish I could, but I can no more give myself to a man without the illusion of love than I can sell myself.

II

I think I know why I did these things; there are times in the life of a woman when she must assure herself that she is still pretty, still desirable. So she does not repel the caress which she does not invite, except just as much as will make it certain that the caress is sought after. She submits because only by so doing can she discover whether her attraction is as intense as it was. One wants to be quite sure that men still want one; it's evidence that one is still alive.

Polly didn't face such complicated problems. She was kissed by anybody, but when she was married she would be beautifully faithful. I realized this as I came to know her better, after spending a week-end with her and her people at their house in Hornsey. Polly had taken a fancy to me. As she put it: "You're not one of us, say what you like. I like your ways; there's something 'orty about you." (Polly had her h's perfectly, but thought this humorous.)

Almost from the beginning she had asked me to come and stay with her, and I had evaded her, partly because I was still rather shy of her class and felt that I wouldn't fit in, partly because she talked vaguely of my sharing her bedroom. I thought this would mean sharing her bed, and I

am not of the kind that shares beds easily. It's uncomfortable, and one doesn't get air. I was made to sleep with Isabel a few times in my life, and tolerated it, but with Polly it would have been unjustifiable intimacy. But she invited me again during my reaction against the unsatisfying week during which I had gone about foolishly with foolish men, always about to commit myself, and despising myself because I couldn't bring myself to it in the end. I suddenly pined for respectable acquaintanceship.

Polly was the only daughter. The house had evidently been cast out of brick in a mold which had also turned out most of the district. The front garden was of yellow gravel, with a green pod in the middle; in the middle of the pod stood a tiny sundial made of pink china. Inside, a dark passage, brown paint, red paper, Polly's bicycle, very much in the way, Mr. Saleby's hats and caps on a hatstand. The dining room, which served as a living room, was at the back. I remember the bottle of salad dressing on the sideboard, a decadent palm in a green pot tied up with a red-silk sash. Polly expressed herself in sashes and bows. In the parlor, which was opened only on Sundays, the sashes and bows were overwhelming. It was impossible to tie bows round the inkstand made out of a horse's hoof, the stamp box, constructed out of concrete into which pieces of onyx, agate, and pebble had been stuck, and round the glass paper weight through which one could see a picture of Queen Victoria spreading civilization, prosperity, and learning through the Empire. At least, I think so, for most of the Empire seemed to be on the right and had peeled off. But there were bows round more palms, round the neck of the yellow china cat with pink spots, round the stem of the lamp, at every corner of the gas bracket; the curtains were embraced by sashes; the mantelpiece was shrouded with a bit of velvet whose corners came out into a rash of satin bows.

We had fried fish, bread and jam and tea. Efforts were made to convert ours into a jolly party, but Mrs. Saleby, a large woman, who had been good-looking, was rather too full of rectitude. She wore a lot of white braid on the front

of her; her stays, being vast and broken in the middle, stuck out with extreme angularity. She occupied part of supper with a discussion on "you young girls, Heaven knows what the world's coming to." She sniffed hard, rather like Miss Probus, but in a less malignant way. Mr. Saleby was very depressed; he was a little man, with discontented, deep-set blue eyes, and a mouth so tight closed over a bony chin that the lips were almost invisible. He was clearly trying to hold on to the situation, and felt inclined to call me Miss. As we went out to meet Elfred, who was to take us to a music hall, Polly said: "You mustn't mind my old people. They haven't done much good, and it tells on 'em. Dad doesn't like me going to work. He wanted me to be a lady."

I understood after a little that the old people felt disgraced because their daughter practically kept them, but soon after we were shaking hands with Elfred who had the seats, and waited for us in the lobby of the Holloway Empire. I had felt a little self-conscious about playing gooseberry, and Elfred too seemed pretty awkward. He was a delicate youth, very thin, with masses of dark hair thrown back from the brow, and unbrilliantined. His conversation with me was elementary.

"It's very nice of you to take me with you."

"I'm sure it's quite a pleasure."

"I see there's a sketch on the program, isn't there?"

"That's about it."

I tried to ease the situation as we went up by hoping there'd be dancing, because girls looked their prettiest in tights. This paralyzed him with shyness, and I think he was glad to get Polly between us. It was a good show, and I laughed a good deal, at first assisted by Polly. But later on she grew dreamy and leaned more and more on Elfred's shoulder. By degrees his encircling arm became obvious; as the evening passed on I was forgotten. They sucked acid drops in meditative community; toward the end I could not be sure whether they were kissing for minutes at a time or whether they had gone to sleep.

Polly was languid when we went to bed. I was spared

sharing and had a bed of my own in her room. I was amused to discover, when she undressed, that she was much slimmer than she looked; she wore three petticoats, of which one was flannel; another caste revelation to me who wore but a film of silk! Still, she looked charming, but all she did was to loosen her hair and shake it. She did not even brush her teeth; while she talked, before turning out the gas, I could not help meditating sorrowfully over her future. She was twenty-five; if only she took care of herself she would be pretty at thirty-five. But all would go. She'd be like her mother, with bits of braid on the front of her, and angular stays. Elfred wouldn't mind. Men of the Elfred kind aren't æsthetic. They like women as animals, and it doesn't much matter what they look like so long as they can fulfill their function as women.

We talked a lot next day, indeed most of the day. We began by going out with our prayer books, to please Mrs. Saleby.

"I don't go to the same church as ma," said Polly, twinkling. "At least she thinks I don't. So perhaps we won't go at all."

We walked through the suburban streets to Highgate; in the afternoon it was the same. We talked shop, of course. One always does, and I learned about the girls things I did not know.

"It's all very well your thinking Miss Merton was particular," said Polly. "But I know better. There was a regular of hers who wrote her a poem once. He was a literary gent. I got it in my album at home. Well, don't you tell me men write poems for girls for nothing. She went to the seaside once, for the week-end, and he let out to me that he'd been to the seaside too. Of course, they didn't stay at the same hotel. Miss Merton was cute."

I asked about Freda, and Polly became censorious. "Oh, she! It's always the same with those foreigners. They aren't particular. I could have had Mr. Higham if I'd wanted, but I like 'em fresh, thank you. You wouldn't believe it: the old thing asked me to come and have dinner at his house. He's a widower."

"What did you say?"

"I said: 'Chase me.' And he did until he found Freda."

"It's all very well for you, Polly," I said, "but you're engaged. You're rather hard on the others."

"A girl's got no call to make herself cheap," said Polly. "I don't mind a bit of fun, in the way of business, but it mustn't go too far." Yes, she'd be proper when she married Elfred. I questioned her about Hilda, and Polly grew respectful.

"Oh, well," she said, "if you ask me, she's a deep one. She's going to marry that sloppy-jawed fellow of hers."

"Mr. Knighton?"

"Yes. Oh, I know what you mean, he's a swell, but there's lots of swells get caught that way. He didn't know what he was in for. He thought that if he just gave her a look, you know, the come-along-darling-and-be-happy look, she'd be all over him. But you watch her. And watch him; he's balmy on her."

Indeed, there was something desperate and enslaved about the young, rather feeble-looking man. He had hardly spoken to me. I discouraged him, for Knighton was too much of my own kind for me to dare to have much to do with him. Besides, Hilda could always draw him from me by a glance of those marvelous eyes.

In the evening we had a sing-song, which began by hymns and quickly degenerated. Mrs. Saleby protested when Elfred insisted on playing "Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula," then gave in. I remember only the bony chin of Mr. Saleby, who chummed in a corner, and Mrs. Saleby, red-faced, as she separately took us aside to tell us that nobody minded her. Two girls and two young men had come in, and two unattached young men followed. It was a very familiar affair, for everybody knew the tunes. Somebody sang at the piano, and everybody yelled the chorus. A number of bottles of ginger ale were brought in, and the couples grew definite, linking themselves without regard for publicity. By and by, they were established, two couples in the parlor, embracing under the indifferent eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Saleby,

while Polly and Elfred withdrew to the back room. The unattached young men meanwhile drew me into the hall, as one of them put it, to show me over this desirable residence. I had some trouble with them. They were very displeasing. One was a shopman, the other something in the same warehouse. I refused to be treated like a tidy bit of goods, and I have a memory of myself standing away flushed and angry. Singing was resumed in the parlor. I heard the chorus:

"... on the stairs,
Lovely pairs...."

"My!" said one of my young men, restoring his tie to his waistcoat, "talk about a blooming hedgehog!"

III

"You mustn't mind them," said Polly, as she lay in bed. "They get larky." She returned to her own affair. "Oh, lor! I wish I could get married."

"Why don't you?"

Once more I heard of the need to establish the old people, of the acquisition of the trousseau, and gathered that the engagement must last long enough to satisfy convention. She exasperated me.

"Look here, do you care for your old people?"

"I don't know. They don't try very hard."

"What would they do if you hadn't been born?"

"Go to the workhouse, I suppose."

I could not tell her that I thought her foolish in her dutifulness. I did feel that she was sacrificing herself to these disgruntled, ungracious old people, giving her youth so that they might have grumbling, grudging, a few more years which would rob her of twenty. I don't respect old life. I was angry with her because she was drifting along, not doing anything, not setting to work to let the available room, not marrying, and letting her old people mess up her life. And she wasn't thinking of it.

"I want twenty-five pounds for a trousseau," she said. "Must have a silk petticoat."

"He'll be fonder of you than of your petticoat," I said. She was rather shocked.

"Oh, well," she summed up, "while there's life there's hope."

Then she told me what a fortune teller had promised her; she would certainly marry her boy, but she must beware of a middle-aged man with a beard. She hadn't met him yet. This rather worried her.

It was very late, and still we talked, once more of Porky, the customers, the girls in the shop. Freda was looking ill, thin, and drawn about the face.

"If you ask me," said Polly, "I say she's copped it." I just understood, for Mr. Higham was only half a mystery. Then Polly discussed something else; such a fact did not impress her; in her, grossness was turned to innocence.

Chapter IX

Julian

I

IT'S all very well. There I was, sneering at Polly because she drifted. What was I doing? Perhaps we all drift, perhaps we can do nothing else. What did I do in the next months? First it was May, then June, then July. Still, there I was, earning my two pounds ten to three pounds a week, attracting, repelling, hesitating, yielding, holding myself back, and merely growing a little older. Things seemed to happen to other women. Thus, toward the end of July, a sudden craziness came over Lawrence Knighton. A special license was bought; at nine o'clock in the morning, by Polly's request, we went to see Hilda married at the registry office of St. George's, Hanover Square. The ceremony was short. Hilda was marvelously cool, certain of herself, by the side of this half-degenerate aristocrat. He did not seem conscious of the mistake he was making. But was he? As the simple formalities went on, I considered the beautiful Hilda, I remembered an absurd, romantic allusion she had made to a Russian who figured in her past, to whom she had refused herself. I remembered a little lecture she read me: "It does not do to compromise yourself before marriage. That is not right. The clergymen teach us our duty, and they know best. That is why I never go out with customers, but always go straight home to my mother. She has a shop in Brixton; she sells sweets and tobacco; it's a general shop, you know."

"You get on?"

"Oh yes. It is one's duty, is it not, to respect one's father and one's mother? When I marry I shall always be kind to my mother. I shall go and see her every Sunday."

"But if you don't marry?"

"If it is my fate not to marry, then I must bear my cross cheerfully." I interjected a question. "Oh no, I could never give myself to a man except in marriage. I have too much respect for my body."

She was amazing. I wondered whether her calm beauty concealed a violent temperament which she could restrain only by measured speech and habits.

The marriage was concluded. She smiled. She had not brought her people to the wedding; had she already developed tact? It was clever of her not to have a church marriage, for this would make Knighton feel less married. What would become of her? I knew her literary tastes. She read many novels, mainly Garvice, Ouida, Mrs. Albanesi, and Mrs. Henry Wood. It would be difficult to civilize her. But there was a foundation in her. I remember phrases: "I will be true to the man I love." "I believe in One above who is my shepherd." "I will meet my dear ones beyond the grave." I kissed her. We all kissed her. Cool and stately, she got into the car and drove away. We never saw them again. I heard lately that Knighton's father is dead. Hilda is a peeress now. I have no doubt that she retains the cool, established voice that conceals desire. She is twenty-eight, at the height of her beauty; I feel that she consoles aged Cabinet Ministers when their party is restless by telling them that every cloud has a silver lining.

II

Toward the end of July, while I was working on the hands of a new customer, I was overwhelmed by his beauty. He lay, negligent, talking very little, but from time to time I threw him a furtive glance which he met without excitement. He looked about thirty, was rosy-faced, with a rather tip-tilted nose. Bright blue eyes gleamed under arched brows that shone like bright gold, and a high forehead led up to a mass of wavy golden hair. To me he was terribly beautiful, like one of those insolent little plaster Apollos. He had no defect at all, for the chin was small but strong; the lips, red

and curling, were cruel and exquisite. The hands were thin, but not weak. As I manicured him I thought that he was together effeminate and a savage, the brooding outcast of an imperial race, some rotten but delicious Hapsburg. We talked very little that time, for his beauty made me shy. Negligently, he asked me a few questions: What was my name? Had I been here long? He did not seem to notice the replies. He made no advances to me, but merely kept his eyes upon me with an air of quiet satisfaction. When he got up to go he looked at his nails and said: "You work well," and went out, giving me sixpence, without promising to return.

He must have disturbed me, for I could not forget him in the following days. After three days I became silly, began to wonder whether he would come in again. He puzzled me, this cool beauty. As he did not come, I told myself that he was effeminate, that a man ought not to look like that. I was unjust, for his good looks hid no weakness; under the delicacy of the skin surfaces lay broad bones.

He disturbed me so much that a widower of forty-five, who had been persecuting me, nearly succeeded. His name was Doctor Kenley, pleasant in a solid way. For two months he had been asking me to dine with him. I refused. I don't know why. But this did not stop him; indeed, his ardor grew. I had to let him kiss me at last. It was easier than to go on struggling. I could not repel him quite, for, after all, this was my trade. Was it because of Julian that I went out with Doctor Kenley? That after the theater he took me for a walk in the Park, where, to my horror and amazement, I had to struggle with him? To threaten to scream? In this mood of disturbance, if a golden head had not glowed before my eyes, the old impulse toward dissipation might have been too strong for me. Two days later Doctor Kenley came in and proposed to me. "You know I love you," he said. "I don't pretend I'm a saint. I don't want to marry again. At least I didn't think so, but I think I could be happy with you if you could be happy with me."

I would have said "yes" a fortnight before, for he was not

unpleasant, and he offered me an independence bought at the price of less dependence than I would have had to accept at home. I didn't then know what held me back. I called it my sense of romance; I called it the reluctance to give up all that might come. I didn't know that anything had come. Only, from time to time, I acknowledged to myself a great desire that this creature should come again and lay upon me the negligence of his bright blue eyes. But he did not come. A week passed. If he did not come within one or two days he wouldn't come at all. He would get manicured elsewhere. He only wanted to be manicured.

Then, as I came out of the Express Dairy in Shaftesbury Avenue, I came against him in the crowd. Our eyes crossed, and he turned, as if to look at me, with an awful, vacuous expression in his eyes. I confess it to my shame. I knew then that he was looking at me as he would look at any pretty dark girl in the street, and yet I smiled. I was already abject, and I didn't know it, because I was already happy.

He recognized me at once. Then: "Oh," he said, and, with pretty cunning, added, "I didn't think you'd know me." What a fool I was to be charmed by such fraudulent humility, but I couldn't help it. I stood stupidly before him, looking upon the red lips that fell away a little from the white teeth.

"That reminds me," he went on, "I want to be manicured." He held out a perfect hand. "Heavens! What talons! Could you take me now, Miss . . ."

"Trent," I said. "Yes, if you like. I've no appointment till three thirty, so I can give you an hour."

I saw an expression cross his face that I did not understand. It has taken five years to show me how foolish was my reply. Already I was offering him an hour when I should have told him that perhaps I could squeeze him in for twenty minutes.

III

And so it began. Other things happened. Freda went away suddenly, making no secret of the fact that she was going to have a child, that Mr. Higham was going to look

after her. She went out silent, undisturbed, committing herself to drifting life. Those cold, silent girls, they are the strongest. It's people like gabbling Polly, people like me, who give themselves away. Out of us are made the macadamized roads that men tread. I wouldn't acknowledge it to myself then, though the feeling screamed itself hoarse in some secret recess of my personality. I cared for that man. It was only at the end of August, when he came back from a holiday, that I grew sure of it, for I realized what that period of loneliness had meant. It was not a progressive growth. Never before had I met a man who neither courted me nor let me alone. I had been used all my life to easy comradeship with the brothers of my girl friends, to men who showed no sign of caring for me; and I was used to men like Oswald, Frank Coriesmore, Doctor Upnor, Philip, the customers at Denman Street, who in no wise concealed that they desired me as wife or lover. Julian was not like that; he fell into no class; he was cool and self-absorbed, and lay in his loveliness, resting upon me a contented gaze. That would have suggested indifference if, at our third meeting, he had not asked who I was, where I came from, and whether I was in love with anybody. He asked this so calmly that I flushed with anger. He didn't seem to care whether I was in love with anybody, and yet he was asking me intimate questions. It is evidence that already I cared for him very much without knowing it, that I told him almost the truth about myself. I did not conceal my county birth, though I did hide my father's name. It was nearly a year since I had told a man the whole truth. In return, he gave a certain amount of confidence. "My name's Julian Quin. You'll never guess my occupation."

I hesitated. "You might be an actor," I said. He shook his head, smiling. "Or a writer. You don't paint, do you?" Still he smiled negatively. "Something artistic, anyhow."

He laughed, squeezing my hand. "Thank you. At last I'm recognized, though mine is the most ignoble of the arts. I design frocks at the Maison Dromina."

I stared at him incredulously. "Frocks!" I gasped. I

knew men designed frocks, but I imagined a different kind of man, some thing more ladylike, scented, who wore turquoise rings, not at all this beautiful but vigorous-looking undergraduate. Also, the reputation of the Maison Dromina made me respectful. So I said:

"I say, that's very clever of you. And at the Maison Dromina, too! That sounds very successful at your age."

"Oh, I'm not as young as I look. I'm thirty-one. Excesses preserve one's looks."

"Do you go in for excesses?" I said. What a new Ursula! A year before, this would have made me shy. Now I was conscious only of a little disappointment.

"Of course," he said. "What else is there to do? Besides, it goes with my trade; it's my job to idolize women; I can't make a frock for a woman unless I'm a little in love with her. In these modern times, you know, and in these modern frocks, none can dress who would not undress." I smiled. He amused me. The candor of the blue eyes clashed with the lips that lacked innocence. He went on talking. He loved his occupation, I could see; it was indeed to him an art, and a little more, an intellectual pastime.

"We designers, you know, we're like barristers, in a way, æsthetic barristers. We both have to make the best of a bad case. The barrister is better off; he appeals to a jury of men; our frocks go before a jury of women, much less merciful and much better informed. You may laugh, but I love taking, let us say, the latest peeress, married long before her husband looked forward to his coronet. She is, well . . . what our American friends call the broad, elemental proposition. She is colored, corpulent, kindly; she has had herself hennaed and marcel-waved. She turns her toes out; she puts her feet down heel and toe together—plump! She wants to put her arms akimbo, but pulls herself together quickly. And she says: 'Oh, Mr. Quin, I saw Miss Teddie Gerard the other day, having lunch at the Ritz. She was wearing a little mole-colored coat and skirt trimmed with skunk, with a high collar, Mr. Quin, that fell away just like this. The skirt fell just like this; I think it must have been

cut on the cross.' She sketches with stubby fingers. Can I make her a little like Miss Teddie Gerard? I can't, but I can make her so that Sheffield wouldn't know her. She enters jet; she goes out brocade."

"You're a conjurer."

He was not listening, but drugging himself with words. "Brocade! What a lovely word. Flame with a gold pattern! That's brocade. Or powder blue with silver flowers. One can't help being a beau in brocade. I'd like to use other stuffs, paisley, paduasoy, moiré, crash, and bombazine. I'd make something of bombazine, something with paniers sticking out . . . as if made of metal. I'm so sick of crêpes, and chiffons, and ninons, and those bastard gabardines."

"You're an artist," I said.

He looked at me, flattered. "I'd like to dress you. Yes, I'd like to make you an afternoon frock."

"What color?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'd have to dream of you a little. It's so obvious that you should wear a rich garnet, or a claret, so obvious that it can't be right. To be well dressed a woman must wear the unobviously obvious color. I shall have to dream of you." I flushed; he saw it, for, suddenly bending forward a little, he added, "It will be easy."

"Don't be absurd." He said no more; the manicure was ending. But he looked at me, holding my hands, and, with a little smile, got up and went away.

Every week we grew a little more intimate. When he said good-by to me, in August, before going for a three weeks' holiday, he said.

"I wish I wasn't going away." He hesitated. "Still, I'm glad I'm going, because I shall look forward to seeing you again." I said nothing. I suppose I looked silly. He took my hand, looked at it with critical pleasure, and I let him, for I trusted my strong dark hands. "You've got good hands," he said, and, bending, kissed the inside of my wrist. It shook me, this slight caress, so little and so much, though at once he released me, made no effort to pursue his advantage.

Those three weeks! After a while I was not only missing

him, but wondering what was he doing. Such a man, who loved women, could not remain unstirred, for they must pursue him. Had he gone away alone? It did not even strike me to wonder whether he was married. Sometimes I built with a sort of agony a picture of Julian, tweeded, in waders, standing in a Scottish burn, with some hateful young woman, her cheeks bright in the crisp sunshine, devoted, asking him to put on a fly for her, being clumsy, being taught, being shown how to cast by two strong white hands that mingled with hers upon the rod. She must throw herself into his arms; she couldn't help it. I wept. I wasn't going away, for I wasn't entitled yet to the fortnight's holiday given by Porky after a year. Besides, where should I have gone to? Could I have revenged myself with a City clerk upon a pier? I was unreasonably jealous of this man who had promised me no faith. Perhaps that was why. If he had not promised himself to me, it was that he did not want me. So I had to reassure myself, by convincing myself that I was still desirable. I thought of Vera Westley, and for a moment nearly swayed into her mode of life. I went to see her, but she was gone. The porter seemed to have forgotten her. That shocked me a little, for that life meant that you were swallowed up, just a little animal. But that was tempting, too, to be swallowed up, to be a dull beast of pleasure, to see between men no more difference than did Vera, see them as funny ones or sloppy ones. A meeting with Monica, in Piccadilly, drove me farther. It was the 1st of August; she was passing through, on her way to Cowes, where her husband, the diplomat, had his yacht. She was a different Monica, more assured, more certain that all was for the best, that nobody need worry. She talked a great deal about herself, about the things she must buy, the yacht and its comic captain, her husband, who was a dear. I saw her eying my clothes, and it was agony, for I was wearing a rather faded blouse, and the awful linen coat and skirt which was bad enough when it was new. Now its original butcher blue had come down to a sort of dirt color. But she told me a little about my old circle.

"We met your father and mother the other day, when we were staying with the Eddertons. They were quite well."

"Did they talk about me?"

"No." She hesitated. "I don't want to say it, Ursula, but it's as if you were dead to them."

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

"I know. I don't want to interfere. Lady Trent looks much older, you know."

"You mean I ought to go back?"

"Just as you like." Then again she talked of the things she must buy.

IV

Little things happened. Freda was replaced by a girl called Pat, a fat, jolly little girl, with small eyes, who became immensely popular. She amazed me because her conversation was made up of unreproduceable coarsenesses. She used words I'd never heard before, and openly said that she was working only because that brought in so much a week, and so she could pick and choose among the boys. My own impression is that she may have picked, but she never chose. These influences combined, and one night I went out with a very pleasant young barrister, determined to refuse him nothing, I don't know why. Perhaps because everybody seemed to do that. But I couldn't. It wasn't Julian. It's something else keeps me straight. I'm a damned lady. I've the worst traditions, and I'm infirm of purpose. Looseness isn't natural to me; it's untraditional. I can remember his surprise when at last I repulsed him. It seemed so late to stop short.

Julian came in without warning me, and he had to wait. Pat put her head into my cubicle to tell me that there was somebody waiting for me, and I looked out from my customer to say that I should be ready in three minutes. It was he. I had to smile, to look easy, with twenty horrible minutes of work before me, over the hands of a man from the City who was giving no trouble but was trying to explain the mechanism of the exchange. Why he thought he ought to explain

the mechanism of exchange, I don't know, except that it was his business and his hobby. So I said "yes," and "no," and "how very interesting," my mind whirling. He was waiting for me. What would he say?

"Gently, gently," said the man, as I dug the knife under the cuticle.

"Sorry." Had absence made a difference? Was he coming back loving me?

"Could you get that bit of hard skin out?" asked my customer. I tried. I hated him. I hoped that the scissors would hurt him. Then I ran short of emery boards, and ran out, having opportunity to ask Julian if he had had a good time. At last it was done, though my customer grumbled about bad polishing, and Julian came in. He terrified me. I was glad of the chance to go out and get some more hot water; a moment to pull myself together. When I came back he was waiting patiently, sunburnt, and more than ever handsome.

"Well," I said, brightly, "so you're back. Back to stuffy old London." I became entirely idiotic and quoted: "Back, back to the office he went; the manager was a perfect gent."

He let me go on for a little time without speaking, only resting upon me his soft glance and his smile. Then, having filed the finger nails of his left hand, I was indicating the bowl of hot water. He released himself, very calmly took my head between his hands, looking into my eyes, as if with a deliberation, half sensual, half cruel, he intentionally deferred his pleasure. I was fascinated in his grasp. I remember that I wanted to resist while there was still time. But one can't, one can't. So I let him draw me closer and kiss me. He held me so for a moment, his lips dwelling upon mine, less with fever than with discrimination. It seemed interminable, this penetrating caress; it held an emotion that I had not known before; it was half a token of love, half a work of art. I know that now, but then I felt only the rush of my own emotions. If I had not been a Trent I would then have flung my arms round his neck in complete abandonment.

He did not abuse his advantage, that time or the next.

This disappointed me a little, for now I confessed to myself that to him I would refuse nothing. But I was glad, too, that he did not think me a subject for casual kisses. I did not understand his capacity for the abstinence that enhances pleasure. I wondered why he did not kiss me again. Had I disappointed him? Then he told me more about himself. He had been married for nine years, to a woman slightly older than himself. They hadn't lived together for several years. They didn't get on. To a timid question of mine he replied: "Oh, it was my fault. I may be a nice lover, but I'm a rotten husband. I could have been a good husband to a harem, but not to a harem of one. At least, not the one I've got."

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes. It isn't that. Only to me she was the end of adventure."

"But won't you ever get tired of adventure?'

"Perhaps. Not yet. I'd like to. You know, Ursula, you think we men are rotters, and that we gad about from woman to woman just for fun. It's not that. What we want is the woman who can make us forget adventure. She's got to be adventure."

After a long time I replied: "It doesn't sound easy. I wonder whether any of us could do that. I don't think I could make a man forget adventure."

He looked at me critically. "I don't know. You're very lovely. With those slumbering eyes, that mouth that calls, that figure fit for French dressing. Oh, you're very lovely." He did not seem to remember that he had kissed me a week before, and this was wounding. He was impersonal; he was thinking of himself. "I've tried to get her to divorce me, but she won't. She's a Catholic, you see. She lives at Hove, and from time to time she writes to me that I shall always find her waiting when I come."

"She loves you, then," I said, experiencing a pang.

"I don't know. She's so keen on doing what's right, that I don't know whether she's keen on doing what she wants. Anyhow, I haven't seen her for five years. I've tried and

tried to get her to divorce me. But she won't. So we must pad along like that."

This confidence oppressed me. It was shattering. I had no thought of marrying him, but it was dreadful to see that it was impossible. It would have been better if it had been possible. I could have hoped. At bottom, I knew that what troubled me was my class cowardice. If he had been a bachelor I could have given way to him, telling myself that this might be the prelude to marriage; that would have been an excuse. But if he could not marry me, I had to face my situation, to tell myself that when he advanced farther, which he must do, then I must make up my mind yes or no. I wasn't used to making up my mind; that sort of thing was hardly done.

So I did not make up my mind, but drifted on into September, in the grasp of a preoccupation so intense that everything else was dwarfed. Horrible things floated in my inner consciousness. For the first time in his life, my father wrote me a savage letter, giving me one last chance to live a home life, and informing me that if I didn't come back within a fortnight he was going to cut me out of his will. He ended:

> . . . I don't want to seem unkind, but I'm not going to stand this any longer. Come back or be cut off. Let that be clear. And I am not going to argue about it.
>
> Yours
>
> WILLIAM R. TRENT.

"Yours"! Papa wrote me "Yours"!—not even "Yours affectionately." This ought to have upset me dreadfully, this loss of some one that was and is dear to me. But it didn't matter; I was wholly in the grasp of another affection. Also, I didn't believe that I should be cut off, not really. I still belonged to the class that has money, where eventually all the women have the use of money. I couldn't conceive myself deprived of my inheritance; that didn't happen to Trent women. This anxiety flowed away. Julian asked me to come to dinner at his flat in Dover Street, suggesting that the res-

taurant cooked fairly well. I hesitated, refused, accepting the alternative suggestion that we should dine at the Berkeley. I knew what I was doing . . . Freda was gone, living under the protection of Mr. Higham, and no doubt her child would soon be born; Pat had aroused me to another danger, to evils that seem incredible when one reads of them in the newspapers, that can afflict only other people, not real people. I knew all that, and I went, shrinking, because I had to go, because my heart ached in general and ached for him. And he was exquisite to me. Foreseeing that my frock might be shabby, he brought with him in a parcel an opera cloak which he handed me as we went into the Berkeley, telling me to put it on in the ladies' cloakroom, if I liked it.

"It's a chilly evening," he said, providing the excuse as well as the cloak.

Seated opposite him, my battered old evening frock half concealed by the sumptuous cloak made of purple, almost black velvet, and heavily fringed in gold, I felt regal. Fringes were in, and I had a fringe. I felt secure. He was respectful and charming, revealing himself more and more. He was earning fifteen hundred a year; his wife had her own money. He only wanted to be happy, and he demanded nothing from me.

We came to an understanding the following Saturday. He fetched me as the shop closed, taking me to lunch at the Carlton. After that we walked without intention into Green Park, and away through Belgravia, until we reached the Embankment and crossed into Battersea Park. Many teams of boys were still playing cricket; a few kicking footballs about. Couples passed us, arms about waists. We went in a boat on the ornamental water; as we passed under the overhanging arch of the trees, the pale-silver sunshine of the autumn made dappled shadows on my frock. It was an idyllic afternoon; the hint of death in the leaves that rustled upon the paths made life more vivid. We went into the aviary, along the crooked path that wanders among the rough palings. We looked at the Japanese pheasant. "What clothes!" said Julian. The gorgeous bird considered us for a

while. He was magnificent, with his deep-blue and scarlet head, his blue breast and crimson legs, his majestic coat of silver white, ending in a silvery moss of tail. His little brown wives stood respectfully a yard away. Then, for a while, we stood before the raven that shone as if enameled. I poked a stick through the bars of his cage for him to play with. As I bent, smiling at the black tongue that curled angrily in the snapping bill, I felt Julian's arm about my shoulders and stood up, suddenly grave. . . . I am conscious of a scene. The fir trees, hanging gray-leaved and dark. The light foliage of the birches shivers in the autumn air. I am in his arms. The clear blue of his eyes questions. He says: "I love you. I did from the first moment. Throw all this up and come to me and be my girl."

I don't quite understand. I say, "How?"

"We can't marry, but I can't do without you. Come and live with me?"

I have an awful sense of finalities. I daren't and I must. So I gain a little time. "Do you really want me?" I murmur.

"I want only you," he replies, and kisses my unresisting mouth.

Then once more I have that sense of the film of life unrolling, so swiftly it bewilders me. I have changed my habitation. It is Sunday morning, and the bells of St. George's are calling to matins a scanty and languid flock. I look at this beautiful creature by my side. It had to be. Yes, he is mysterious and content. But is he content? I feel unworthy, and so bend down and whisper, "Are you disappointed?" He draws me to him to caress and reassure me, and because he does so I am reassured. Never did I ask myself whether Philip was disappointed. I was conscious only of my own disappointment. From him I had taken without ruth. To Julian I wanted to give, and I feared that I had not enough to give.

"And are *you* disappointed?" he murmurs. I kiss him then, abased and protesting. He must not blaspheme his own name.

PART III. THE FLAT IN DOVER STREET

Chapter I

Emotions

I

EMOTION? I wonder! In times like those one hardly has time for emotion. Too much happens. One's too excited, frightened, proud, ashamed. It's marriage without its publicity, its definition. For a girl like me to go and live with a man whom she couldn't marry meant that I must hide an action that could not be hidden. Other things were happening. I had to move, to resign my position, and to do this without giving myself away to Mrs. Witham, to Polly and Pat. My letters would have to go somewhere; I had to convey to Mrs. Witham that I'd become better off, to Polly that I was taking a job as secretary to another lady novelist who lived in Dover Street. Somebody would meet somebody; the stories would clash. Somebody would charge me with lying, and I would tell a third lie. Mamma would write to me, and, one day, by mistake, I would use Julian's paper. Mrs. Witham wouldn't forward forever. Oh dear!

And the horrid sense of publicity! It was all very well for Julian to tell the porter who brought up my trunks not to knock his wife's dressing case about; it was all very well for the porter to say, "I'll be careful, sir." But was the porter deceived? Julian had lived a year in that flat. Did not the porter wonder why Mrs. Quin had never appeared before, a young and pretty Mrs. Quin, without whom Julian seemed to have done very well? Also—and this thought was ravaging—was it credible that nobody else had ever visited that flat during that year? Perhaps not nominal Mrs. Quins, but quite enough to make me, the Mrs. Quin, if he accepted me as such, an object for commiseration.

Still, as I set out my bottles on the dressing table I reflected that the porter was a man, and that men are easily

deceived. But a devilish chambermaid came in to ask me if she could do anything for me. She seemed interested in me. She was a nice-looking, rather bold girl with carroty hair. Within two days she called me Mrs. Quin instead of Ma'am. If I had encouraged her, we should have exchanged love memories. She unpacked for me, while I fussed in the wardrobe; my instinct told me that as she worked, the girl was examining my clothes. I could deceive the porter, but I couldn't deceive a woman. She knew what Julian's clothes cost; she'd make no mistake about my things, and especially my boots and shoes. As I set out my poor trousseau I hated the carroty-haired girl; this service flat chambermaid, she lived among Dover Street underclothes; she knew that my things were cheap and poor; no doubt she was counting the ladders in my stockings, or, worse, she was noting with contempt that some of them were hole-proof. Of course she was also turning my gloves inside out to note that they have been cleaned.

"That's all right," I said, savagely, turning round. "Don't trouble; I'll finish."

"Very well, ma'am," said the girl, surprised. She stood there for a moment, expecting me to talk, smiled pleasantly, and went out.

I was very unfair to the chambermaid, whose name was Beatrice and whom I learned to call B. She was entirely nice, and if I had known her then as well as I came to later I shouldn't have bothered, for Beatrice had been in service in this block for four years; she had unpacked many trunks, and had seen clothes of all kinds, Callot, John Barker, Bourne & Hollingsworth, and Stagg & Mantle; she had washed a chemise for a young lady who had to stay in bed while it dried, because she had no other. A Russian princess had given her a chinchilla muff because she was bored with the color. I was not fit to astonish a service flat chambermaid.

II

Julian overlaid all that. He was charming; he did everything for me except what would have compromised me.

Thus, he left it to me to settle Porky and Mrs. Witham, but when I arrived in the early afternoon I found a fire burning, a large bunch of roses in a vase, and a new toothbrush in a little parcel marked: "Toothbrush for Ursula, because one always forgets it." I was very shy. I was in a sense newly wed. When I went out to look at the shops I was very frightened. Suppose somebody met me? What should I say? I knew very few people, but eventually I must meet somebody. Dover Street is a bad place to hide in. I realized then how completely I had cut myself off from the established, ordinary things. This wasn't an intrigue; this wasn't one of the little affairs that Isabel probably indulged in; it was something radical, and irrevocable. My relation with Philip, that was not important, for it was secret; I mean it was important only to me, to my mental development, and the world would never bother about it, provided I grew rich and did not force the world to notice it. I could have had affairs with a dozen Philips in a single year, if they proved reasonably discreet, if I held my tongue, didn't dress outrageously, and was not seen in extreme clothes too often at too extreme places. Nobody would have cared. I was young enough, pretty enough, well born enough to be given the benefit of the doubt by a world that has no doubts at all. I could have been like Vera Westley if I'd dressed quietly, and at the end married respectably and gone on the Committee of the Society for the Moralization of Modern Times.

But this thing was different. My alliance with Julian, that was so much franker than my folly with Philip, so much more decent, so much more inevitable, because Julian couldn't marry me, this, the world had to see it. The world had to have its nose put into it and, willy-nilly, had to sniff with disgust.

"I've done it," I thought. "Now I'm an outcast, an outlaw. I'm excommunicate, and neither sackcloth nor ashes will ever get me back." It was lovely. To go along Piccadilly carrying a load of crime for which you can't be arrested. You see, I'm not a nice girl, not really. I don't have proper feelings at all. I ought to have gone to Julian tearful and

carried away by my better judgment, by the extremity of my feelings, and I ought to have soothed my remorse by telling myself, "Perhaps I may be forgiven because I loved much." Well, no; I did feel lowered; I couldn't break down the old ways of thinking; I knew that if I met Monica, or my sister, I'd feel awkward; but I couldn't quite dull the glow of my adventure. All through my embarrassment, my absolute fear, ran a vengeful streak: "Take that, Burleigh Abbas! I've escaped your plaster of Paris. I'm going to the devil, I suppose, but I'd rather go to him than back to Burleigh Abbas."

No, I'm not a nice girl. I couldn't help being happy. It was delightful to see Julian go to work in the morning, and round about six o'clock to expect him to come home, to look at the clock like a young wife, to think of something nice to say, a bit of gossip, or something out of the evening paper. Five to six, he wouldn't be long. I rang for two Martinis.

He arrives early, a smile upon his lips. A kiss, grateful and pleasant, a conjugal kiss. He doesn't hesitate, for he's got me now, and all my boats are burned. It is delicious that he should not hesitate, that he should be so secure of me. But he is a lover, and holds me to him for a long time. I rub my cheek against the smooth serge of his shoulder. A faint scent of Egyptian tobacco reaches me. And he lays upon my cheek his that is now a little harsh. I am his; I am lost; I am found. I would not stay at home and I wanted my freedom. But what's the good of a woman's freedom except to surrender it to a man?

We talk of the events of his day, just as if we were married and he were coming back from the Stock Exchange, as I sit upon his knees and he plays with my hair.

"I had a stroke of luck to-day," he says. "The Ranee of Chukapala came in to-day. She's decided to become European, and I'm to make her six afternoon dresses and twelve evening frocks. I wish I could do her coats and skirts, but I'm no good at it."

"Oh yes, you are," I protest. Of course he can do anything.

"No. I know my limitations. I had to hand her over to Mr. Kalisch for those, and Corine will fit them."

"Who's Corine?"

"Second in command for coats and skirts."

"Is she pretty?"

"Now don't be silly." He pinches my ear. He is charming. "She's as ugly as virtue. There, will that do? Or shall I bring her photograph?"

"All right," I say, grudgingly, shaking him by the shoulder. "I suppose I must trust you. I can't do anything else. But the Ranee? What's she like?"

"Well, she's rather pretty. Oh, don't pinch me like that! My dear girl, she's a nigger."

"So am I, practically. You say you like them dark."

"Yes, darkest England, but not lightest India. Now do keep quiet or I shall lose my inspiration."

I grow respectful while he sketches the frocks. It is a difficult job. The Ranee is quite young, has regular features, and is merely coffee-colored. He has a scheme of deep cream and gold for one of the evening frocks. He is trying to get away from obvious orange, and is considering apricot chiffon and fur trimming.

"It's a terrible job," he says. "If it was only one or two of each! But eighteen at a time! I'll either repeat myself or I'll do something frightful for the sake of variety."

"You won't," I murmur, soothingly. I am sure that he cannot err.

III

Julian sleeps. It is early in the morning; the light which I have shrouded with pink chiffon hangs over his head. Julian sleeps. The soft light brings out shadows upon the profile crushed into the pillow, hollow darknesses in the glowing mound of his hair, where flows a wave from the waters of Lethe. He lies upon his side, and the golden eyelashes shade the cheek that is rosy and humid with sleep. The bright eyebrows glow. Pressed upon the pillow the cheek is shaped forward, like the fallen petal of an enormous

rose. Here and there gleam the little hairs grown in the night. They gleam upon the narrow, flat cheeks, the chin that is angelic and virile. As he sleeps a smile falls like dew upon the short upper lip; it parts from the lower lip that pouts, lip tender, lip avid, lip petulant and prayerful, so hungry and so sweet, lip that releases a white gleam of teeth. Julian sleeps, abstract and removed under the rosy light, and his sleep is dreamless and innocent. He is weak and exquisite, purposeful in his desires, aloof in his absence from me. When he sleeps, to him I am not. Sleep! Wayward demigod, strayed into mortal shape. I will bend down and lay upon your brow a kiss so gentle that it shall not steal your spirit away from the far realm where now you have your being. Indeed, in your sleep, when you feel my lips upon that smooth brow, you shall be haunted by other dreams, and there shall come to you through my lips that have no skill, the phantom of an impossible Venus who shall clasp you, my Julian, and deserve your sweetness.

IV

So I was dependent again, and I didn't mind. I had in me no suffragette ferocity, no desire to be free except within the limits of my affections. Now that I loved, loved for the first time, I didn't mind. One's not dignified when one's in love. I had very little money left; only about four pounds remained of Uncle Victor's twenty, and I didn't know what to do, for the clothes that had been suitable for a lonely manicurist would hardly do in my new world. It was all very well to "break into freedom," as the modern novels put it; it was all very well "facing hand in hand a cruel world," as the older novels put it. In fact, I wasn't breaking into freedom at all, and the cruel world was represented by the portion of London that lies between Devonshire House, Aldwych, New Oxford Street, and Charing Cross. It isn't disposed to be cruel so long as you have a pound in your purse and no back to your frock. It took me some time to find that out; then I understood that it would welcome me and my four pounds,

provided I spent them in an evening, say at the rate of five thousand a year.

So I desperately wanted an evening frock—several, indeed. Oh, men don't understand what it is to want a frock. They go on wearing their dirty old clothes (yes, they are dirty, for men seldom have them cleaned, and they choose them of a color that doesn't show the dirt). They've set up the tradition that a dandy is only half a man; they can go, content and popular, in baggy knees and frayed collars. We love them none the less, and I wonder whether this attitude of ours does not arise from a consciousness that if we let men be dandies in silken jerkins and ruffled shirts there'd be less money to dress us. Or perhaps it is just that most of us, we've nothing else to do.

I thought of that at the time, and then told myself: "Damn philosophy! I want a frock. I want lots." I didn't like to ask Julian for money. He wasn't quite my property enough; also, the idea that he would give me money imported something venal into our relationship. I suppose I shouldn't have felt that if I'd been his wife, for then he'd have bargained before a registrar and not in the court of Cupid. Fortunately Julian had tact. I hardly like to say, even now, that he had very little more, that his charm, his disinclination to be disagreeable or to give pain, arose solely from cowardice before scenes. But I am not sorry to have known him, I do not regret anything I have done, for it has made me what I am. (Evidently I am still pleased with myself.) On the second day he said something about opening a banking account for me; this never came to anything, for in the end he gave me ten pounds a month to throw about, and paid my dress bills. He got me some clothes and did it gracefully. He didn't say that I was a poor little beggar girl that Cophetua had picked out of the Denman Street gutter. He said: "I say, Ursula, what luck we ran away in October. Just when you were going to get your winter rig-out! So I can help you."

He didn't take me to the Maison Dromina; nothing was said about it, but we both realized that this would be a bit

thick. Except for my coat and skirt, which were lovely, a sort of autumn-leaf color edged with Kolinsky, he practically made my clothes himself. Julian really was an artist; at least, he took as much trouble as any painter painting a portrait. First he draped; then he took out the pins; he draped again; readjusted. It looked all right. Then he unpinned again. And again. I became crazy with irritation, and just when he was satisfied he disliked the effect and tried an entirely new scheme. He brought length after length of stuff from the Maison Dromina in a suit case, which he took back the next morning. He tried experiments in skin contrasts with varieties of fur, with gold, with silver, with scarlet, with blacks of different textures.

"Oh!" he gasped. "It's so nice to be able to take time. The clients jiggle about so." I was his lay figure, but it was worth while suffering. With the assistance of a girl from the Maison Dromina, whom he employed occasionally in this way, for poor but inspiring clients, he made me three afternoon frocks and three evening frocks. I won't describe them all, not that I don't remember them, but it would take too much space. But I must describe one of the evening frocks, just to see it again in my mind. It was made of lemon-yellow brocade shot with orange, very soft and clinging; attached was a narrow, dragging train, draped up on the left hip. It was not very low in front, but it had practically no back. Strings of jet beads served as shoulder straps and carried a trimming that intoxicated me; two epaulets of orange paradise, framing but not hiding the shoulder, and edged with black paradise, merciful to the skin. I had very little on, and remarked on it to Julian.

"Yes," he said, "it may be a little marked, but you're the one woman in a hundred who could wear it. Ah! it's lovely to dress you instead of making a frock for Lady Profiteer and watching her expand in it. It's just hell. But you mustn't wear it too often. Your flame-colored frock will see you through; it's a very popular color, and so the frock won't get noticed. And there's your little black dance frock. You've got to have a black dance frock until the

time comes when the men wash their hands before each dance."

I laughed. In those days, everything he said was amusing. I thought him so wonderful that I needed nobody else. I was content to loaf about and to watch for him to come home. I had no friends and needed none. Except that I should have liked to collect Polly, Miss Merton, and Vera Westley, and Hilda, and Aunt Augusta—no, not Aunt Augusta—to show him to everybody, to give them a treat. I was entirely abased; I had reacted from my impulse to independence. For a moment, like a man, I had refused to take an allowance from my people, because, like a man, I wanted to preserve my dignity. Now I was a woman again; I was material, and loved a thing or a man more than an idea; my old feminine habits, acquired as a daughter, of being kept by somebody, of being tipped, asserted themselves. Maybe women will not always be like that, and that they will take their share of blows as well as kisses in the work of the world, but I am not the woman of the future. Grapes when I'm ill, hats when I feel better, *mille fleurs* when I go out, and kisses at all times. I'm afraid that represents more than the surface of my temperament.

I think I made Julian happy then; I was infinitely attractive to him. That was a source of pride to me, for it seemed difficult to charm a creature so virile, that looked so feminine. He was fastidious, willful, and it pleased me to bend to his fancy. How I came to hate Julian! Did I? Can I? Does one hate the child that with a sportive ball breaks your matchless Lowestoft bowl? No, I can't hate him even now, though I need other things besides grapes, hats, *mille fleurs*, and kisses; in regard to Julian, I still feel immense gratitude, for he made me love him, and I'd never loved before. I must be a little faithful, even to the faithless.

Chapter II

A Party

I

IT was three weeks after my establishment at Dover Street. During that time I had spoken to nobody except Julian and Beatrice, with whom I was on good terms, though I found it difficult to refuse her confidences. Beatrice knew such a lot.

"They're a funny crowd in this block, Mrs. Quin. For instance, on the first floor there's Mr. Sutton. I mean to say, he don't live there, Mrs. Quin, but he sort of turns up now and again to see Miss Billy Rainham and her ma." Confidentially: "If you ask me, Mrs. Quin, if I was a man I'd rather fancy the ma. Mind you, I dunno. Perhaps it *is* the ma he's after. Or both. You never know, do you?"

"No," I said, laughing.

"And at number six, Mrs. Quin, it's quiet enough, but Mrs. Thursby, she's that squiffy most of the time that she rings for her breakfast at four in the afternoon. Course, she starts reviving after that. She don't give much trouble. Jim and I get her up all right in the service lift. Wouldn't do to bring her up in the passenger lift, Mrs. Quin. It 'd give the house a bad name."

"That would be a pity," I said.

"Rather. They say, what's in a name? But I say everything's in a name. On the whole, you know, they aren't bad. Mr. Colwell, for instance, he shares number five with Mr. Sowerby. They never make trouble. Except that Mr. Sowerby does sing a little too late at night as he plays the mandolin in his blue-silk pajamas. You'd like Mr. Colwell, Mrs. Quin. He's a handsome man, just like a policeman.

But I like Mr. Sowerby better. Such a pretty fair-haired boy with manners like a little lady. Course, he 'ain't got the figure of Mr. Quin."

In spite of my attempts to stop her, Beatrice would discuss Julian also, with an air of tender longing. But she was a nice girl, and, when the hot-water system went wrong, brought me up hot-water bottles unasked. I might have so gone on forever, though I suppose at the end I should have got tired of the Dover Street Eden. But Julian did not intend to hide me. Not only had he provided the frocks, but at the same time there arrived a large number of boxes. Knowing my sizes, he had brought me shoes and gloves and stockings. I let him do everything except hats. He knew much more about it than I did. When I was ready he said, "Now we're going to a dance." Another Julian revealed itself. It appeared, though he did not say so, that I had made a breach, three weeks broad, in some ancient habits, that the normal Julian never stayed at home in the evening.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Went out to dine with the devil knows who, and then to dance with Heaven knows what."

"So you miss it?" I said, suddenly disappointed. It was the traditional awakening of the young bride. I was in that moment just like a little suburban wife, who discovers after the honeymoon that her husband is still a Freemason.

"Of course I don't, you cuckoo. Only do you think I'm going to hide you away here?"

"Aren't you happy?"

He took me in his arms and, having kissed me, fixed upon me those laughing eyes. "Happy?" he said. "No." He smiled at my surprise. "How can I be happy when my pride isn't satisfied? When I've won the sweetest, the most beautiful woman in the world and can't show her to everybody? When I can't go round introducing her, and saying: 'Look! this is what I've got. This wonderful, this lovely thing.' Ursula, I'd like to march you up and down Piccadilly behind a band, so that everybody in the world might see you and envy me."

I sighed. He was charming. I suppose that's what he wanted, but no doubt I was rather trying; I want too much, I'm exacting. Already, now and then, he fell into casual moods; he went to sleep at once after we'd said good night. I couldn't be to him a continual torment, and that is perhaps why, now and then, I made myself into a torment. I wanted him to be happy through me, and yet never to be content. I had to disturb him always. My fault, I suppose. I'm like other women, an octopus.

II

It was half past ten; we were at Compton's. A large cellar in Coventry Street. A very long room, with green-painted walls, roofed by a purple vault spangled with golden stars. A scarlet dado caught up the paint of the woodwork. Hanging from the roof, many chandeliers shed brutal, unshaded light. For a moment I paused, blinking a little, like a moth entrapped. There was such a crowd, not only upon the polished oak floor, dancing, making eddies of light and darkness, splashed here and there with bright color, but everywhere black and white clumps of men about a pillar or a door, couples and groups at little tables, round bottles and meats, heads close together, each group surmounted by an eddying cloud of pale-blue smoke.

"Come along," said Julian, taking me by the arm, and I let myself be gently pushed forward, past a misty commissionaire, dressed in electric-blue and gold, and looking seven or eight feet high. For a moment I stood moving my toes inside my shoes. I was frightened. I'd never been to a dancing club before, and I wasn't ready for what I could see and hear at the end of the room: four stout and glistening negroes, of whom two twanged banjos, while a third dislocated himself over a drum, and a fourth leaped from side to side, striking with a dozen arms unexpected things, kettles, dinner bells, and frying pans.

"Come along, darling," said Julian, drawing me toward the floor. As I stepped on, all the negroes together emitted a frightful yell; I took it as my welcome. But as I began to

dance, as we went round the room, as couples passed us very close, as I more coolly perceived my companions, an excitement rose in me. I was liking it. The people interested me, the highly groomed youths, the rather brutish fat men who showed a crumpled edge of linen round their bulging shirt fronts, and especially the women, little, fair, bobbed, stripped women, excessive women with erected hair, and wet eyes in a white mask.

> ". . . And it's all through you, Mr. Pussyfoot!
> Puss, Puss, Puss, Puss, Mr. Pussyfoot!
> By and by we'll all be dry.
> No more going out upon the tiddli-hi! . . ."

yelled the negroes. I laughed.

"Do you like that music?" said Julian, smiling, his lips close to mine.

"How do you know I haven't heard it before?"

"Because you're a little white goose," he shouted.

"Goose yourself!" I screamed against the band.

As if giving me the measure of the place, he touched my cheek with his lips, while a girl who was passing us turned away from her man to say: "Don't bite her! You'll spoil your appetite."

I laughed; I didn't mind. Yet what a thing to happen in a public ballroom to Ursula Trent, of Ciber Court, Burleigh Abbas! I suppose all these women round me came from some sort of Ciber Court, if a little less expensive, and were bashful once upon a time. After all, every girl has been six years old.

I discovered with some satisfaction that Julian did not dance very well. To begin with, he knew very few steps, one of which, a variation of the jazz roll, was pretty fair, except that he hopped, but whenever he saw a vacant space he precipitated himself into a swirling two-step that made me giddy. I didn't tell him just then, but, later in the evening, when I had made friends, when I had drunk a large glass of ginger ale which tasted much stronger than the ginger ale

of my past, I said: "Julian, I'm going to take you in hand. Glide—there, that's it. Keep your feet on the ground, there's a darling." As he attempted to break into that awful scenic railway two-step, I kept him down and made him walk me quietly. He took it very well; indeed, at many other dances I became his leader. I was proud to make him do what I liked.

Evidently Julian knew a good many people here, for a number were introduced in turn. Ida Quin, his sister, whose name I knew from theater programs, and who accepted the new Mrs. Quin with supreme ease, with such ease that for one horrible moment I wondered whether she was used to her brother's Mrs. Quins. A short, stocky man with close-cropped hair was introduced to me as Bill Gordon, the Durham middleweight, who was in the running for the English boxing championship. More women. Somebody who was merely Sadie, a tall, pretty woman, rather worn about the chin. Then an amazing little fellow, a stage decorator known as Arf a Mo', inevitably, no doubt, because his name was Arthur Moy. Arf a Mo' danced with an exquisiteness I shall not meet again; it was like moving with a pillar of cloud; one just moved; but he irritated me because he would break into this ideal, impersonal movement with rapid, yelping conversation. He was a little pink, thin man, incredibly active, with eyes like gray beads that started forward. He knew everybody.

"We've got a crowd here to-night," he said. "I don't know why. Sometimes this place is as empty as a church. To-night everybody's here."

"I don't know many people," I murmured.

"No? . . . Why, they're all celebrities, peers, or gaolbirds." He nodded toward a delicious red-haired girl. "There's Christine—Christine Waldron, the cine player. She's going to give the knock to Mary Pickford before she's done."

"Who is she dancing with?"

"Oh, anybody but Miltiades."

"Miltiades?"

"Of course you don't know. He runs her. He's the little

Greek chap in the corner—I'll show you—moping behind a cigar, while Christine dances with Tom and Dick, and yet doesn't make Harry jealous. That's Lord Alf with her. Lord Alfred Lydbrook. He's a card, Alf! Good chap. If a girl's broke, she can always get a fiver out of Alf, and for nothing."

He pointed out others, a Mr. Pawlett, who was just Pawlett, and Bob Freeland, of whom all one could say was that there was no vice in him. I got awfully muddled. Everybody seemed to be Billys and Tootoos. I was shown the real Tootoo, a pretty, fair girl, who, Arf a Mo' said, at present had no past. Also an amazing fat person, very Jewish, with a pearl-and-gold watch chain across an extensive white waistcoat, Mr. Montmorency Satterthwaite.

"Heavens! What a name!" I said.

"Yes," said Arf a Mo'. "His old name of Moses Samuel was handier. But I like old Moses—beg pardon, Montmorency. He runs his cinemas for the elevation of public morals. Goes to them himself. I've seen him weep over his own film, 'Poor Little Dollie.'"

When he took me back to the table where I had left Julian, I was introduced to more people, to Bob Freeland, very neat and trying to look very fast. Ida Quin, I thought, did look very fast; with unashamed powder and public lip salve she proceeded to make herself neat. Sadie joined us, Bill Gordon following, with them a big, heavy, dark dancer who was introduced simply as The Woman. They stared at me. But there was no time for talking. I danced with Bill Gordon, who was even worse than Julian, but knew it and painstakingly explained to me that a boxer's balance and a dancer's balance were not the same thing. He seemed out of place here, this sturdy, blunt-featured fellow, slow of speech and broadly north country. So serious did he seem that, emboldening, I said:

"You don't seem to be enjoying yourself."

"That I am," he replied, indignantly. Then, after a pause, "It's a tony sort of place."

I realized that Bill Gordon had social ambitions. To be

a boxer was all very well, but to be a fashionable boxer was better, for then one might be noticed by Mr. Starnberg and have a big match fixed for one at the Stadium.

I danced with Bob Freeland, a beautifully barbered young stockbroker. He said audacious things to me in a shy way. He was rather nice, so respectable and trying so hard to be depraved. I danced with Arf a Mo' again, with newly introduced people, with Walter Slindon and Karl Meerbrook. I got very hot, but, being dark, I didn't show much. Just as the end came and the negroes played "God Save the King," I realized that I was enjoying myself. Julian must have known it, for, suddenly seizing me by the arm, he murmured to two or three collected round: "The night is yet young. Come home with us and see if there's any whisky." They agreed, but The Woman protested.

"No, it's too late. You all come back with me. I only live round the corner." After some dispute The Woman collected Julian, Ida Quin, Sadie, Bill Gordon, and me. Arf a Mo' excused himself, saying he might be in later. I felt very dissipated, walking up Coventry Street with the little crowd. We had only a few yards to go, for The Woman's flat was in Panama Mansions, on the other side of Leicester Square. The October air fell softly from a deep-blue sky studded with golden nails. The Woman had gone ahead on the arm of Bill Gordon, and I found myself walking with Sadie, who confided that she was a cine player.

"That woman's a fool," remarked Sadie, nodding toward her hostess. "I know her little game, but it won't come off."

"What little game?"

"Didn't you see that she wouldn't come to your flat? She wanted to get us all into hers. She wants to keep us there so late that Bill Gordon won't think it worth while to go home."

"You mean that she and Mr. Gordon? . . ."

"Well, what do you think? But she's a prize idiot. He's not going to throw himself away while he's in training, and she hangs round his neck instead of dangling before his nose.

She'll come to a bad end, you'll see. She's got too much heart."

I didn't think Sadie had too much heart. The cine player looked about thirty-three, was very tall, rather thin. Her banded golden hair lay evenly round a brow rather too high, and her mouth was thin, a little cruel. I did not like her much, but she insisted on confiding in me within a few minutes of our first acquaintance. She was fed up with Pawlett.

He had little kick and little cash. "Kick or cash, that's my program for a man." Sadie was one of the few who were confidential. I soon found out that, in these circles, everybody maintained an air of respectability, while leaving no moral covering to anybody else. She made me a little nervous.

III

The Woman's flat was on the fifth floor of a tall block. The stairs were dark and not very clean. Behind a door, as we passed, I heard male laughter and feminine giggles. The Woman's flat surprised me. I had expected, I don't know why—the locality, perhaps—something like Vera Westley's flat. Instead I found it was Vera's dream, the dream of a successful Vera—a flat in the Oriental style. The Woman let our chattering party into a small hall painted sky blue and decorated with a frieze of golden crescents and stars. Across the white-painted floor lay a Persian rug. As we went in, a door in the passage opened and The Woman's maid appeared. She was a negress, clad in a curious smock of scarlet and gold, tied in at the waist.

"Get something to drink, Suli," said The Woman, and led us into the drawing-room. Though the hall had prepared me, I was not ready for this dim apartment with the deep-blue walls separated by black panels, for the primrose ceiling, and especially for the fact that there were no chairs. All round the room were arranged divans, one a hard box mattress, the other two swollen and loaded with cushions that tumbled in piles toward the wild red-and-green carpet. Under the light that fell from a lantern of multi-colored

glass, the cushions stared, orange, Turkish green, fawn spotted with blue, purple, cardinal, gold tissue; here and there a dead-black cushion gave relief.

Rather shyly I seated myself, Julian following, on the box couch. This was rather, I suppose, a test of temperament. The unawakened would avoid the divans. But nobody seemed impressed by this prismatic apartment. While The Woman fussed in the hall, chasing the negress and hurrying the drinks, our party disposed itself where it could—namely, Julian with me, and on the opposite divan Bill Gordon, with impartial arms round the waists of Sadie and Ida Quin. When The Woman came in I was amused to see her fling at Sadie a look of hate, upon which the cine player turned to the boxer and said in a falsetto voice: "Don't tickle me, Bill, before everybody."

"Here, Sadie," said The Woman, "have a whisky?" And, unable to contain herself: "Don't maul her about, Bill. Try to remember this isn't the public house you're used to."

I was frightened; I was expecting a quarrel. But nothing happened. Sadie got up languidly, faced The Woman, and said:

"Don't play the goat, you silly kid." Everybody laughed, and I realized how light were these people's emotions, for The Woman laid a handsome, thick brown arm round Sadie's waist.

There was plenty to drink in that flat, for Suli had brought in, together with whisky, various liqueurs, and even some bottles of beer. Julian, who was watching me with an air of vague amusement, made me drink whisky. As I let him mix it for me I soon felt less foreign in this atmosphere. There was no reason to feel foreign. Everything was easy enough, and a little later Arf a Mo', followed by a tall, stoutish, square-headed man with a Kaiser mustache, called Starnberg, came in to add deep voices to our shrill ones. I had some more whisky. Everybody was smoking. Then The Woman had a sort of quarrel with Bill Gordon because he refused to drink anything but soda water.

"You're training again, I suppose," she snarled.

"Yes," he said, stockily. "I'm fighting Tuesday week. Can't take risks."

"What's the good of your coming here?" she growled, her fine eyes glowing. "I wonder they let you dance."

"Good exercise," said Bill Gordon. "It makes you sweat."

"Ah, don't be disgusting!" said Sadie.

"Don't overdo it, Bill," said Arf a Mo', "or you'll be turning into a jockey."

Bill Gordon was vigorously chipped, and Mr. Starnberg's guttural voice was heard declaring that he ought to be undressed on the spot to see if he was putting on flesh.

We were resorting ourselves a little now. Ida and Arf a Mo' on one divan, hand in hand, and seeming to think of something else; The Woman, very close to Bill Gordon, who methodically sipped his soda water, with Sadie on a cushion at their feet, blowing smoke rings into their faces. Starnberg, who, on entering, had laid upon me a glance that corresponded with his coarse features, had joined Julian and me on the box mattress. He was talking to me in a ponderous, fatherly way, asking me what I did, whether I liked dancing, and would I care for a ticket to see a fight he was organizing next week? I found out that he was an American, presumably of German origin. He had many interests. He was evidently an organizer, not only of boxing, but of light opera, and seemed to own an interest in a dancing club or two, for he offered us a free pass. I answered him shyly, and he seemed to like me, this big, brutal-looking, not unkindly man. But, after a time, though I was a little fuddled, my mind drifted away from him toward the general conversation. I'd never heard that sort of conversation. Just now Satterthwaite was being discussed.

"I can remember Moses—beg pardon, Montmorency," said Arf a Mo', "when he kept a peep show in Tottenham Court Road. It hadn't got a name; painted outside was merely, 'Pay a penny and have a look.' It cost a penny extra to go into the inner room 'for adults only.' I went in when I was thirteen and was greatly disappointed."

"You always were precocious, Arf a Mo'?" said Sadie.

"Born *blasé*."

"Why don't you get hold of Christine? She specializes in the *blasé;* that's why Miltiades can never think of anything better to do than to sit behind a cigar," said Julian.

"Oh, let Christine alone!" snapped Sadie. The company exchanged glances. One knew that she was sick of Pawlett, but that didn't make his leaning to Christine any more acceptable. So Arf a Mo,' who had tact, returned to Tootoo, who was acting in a revue called "Skirt." How they hated her!

"I don't see what men see in that washed-out little sheep," remarked Sadie.

"Don't you?" said Arf a Mo'. "She's no more washed-out than any other fair woman."

"Don't be rude. I've got color in my hair. And, anyway, there's life in it."

"It would snare a saint," said Arf a Mo'.

"You should pay your golden tresses into the Bank," added Julian.

Sadie laughed. "You're all pulling my leg. But it's true. Not that there's any harm in Tootoo, except that I can't stand her high and mighty ways."

"I'm afraid," said Julian, "that what it really comes to is that Tootoo is straight."

"Calculating, you mean," said Sadie.

"Same thing. And I don't see why all you women are so mad with her. Supposing she does like going home to mamma after the theater. Well, why not? That's how you become a peeress."

I laughed. How much wittier he was than the others, and he stroked my arm as he talked.

The conversation passed to Meerbrook's new music for a light opera which Starnberg described as the leg chorus. Nasty suggestions were made about Meerbrook, though everybody seemed to like him. Then I found that Sadie was describing to me a process invented by Madame de Louviers for the curing of chinny chins.

"My dear," she whispered, "it's perfectly wonderful.

No straps, no masks; just a little petting and patting, and a cream that smells like heaven." She fingered the slight puckers over her jaw. "It does prey on one so."

I was feeling more at home. Starnberg was still talking to me in his heavy way, while Julian from time to time flung me a soft glance that expressed admiration. It was very reassuring. Suddenly Sadie leaned forward and said, in a low voice: "I say, it isn't late. Let's have a whiff."

There was a moment of silence, and everybody looked a little shy. "Oh, I don't know," said The Woman.

"Come on," said Sadie.

"Good idea," said Arf a Mo'.

Bill Gordon protested, begging us not to be damned fools. This seemed to inflame The Woman. "Shut up!" she said, brutally. "This is my flat, isn't it? Get out if you don't like it." She struck a gong. A whispered word to Suli, and in a moment the negress returned with a tray on which stood a lamp, a dozen little pipes, and a gray substance in a bowl. Bill Gordon protested again. To my surprise, Julian interfered.

"Don't be absurd, Bill. It isn't dope."

"Can't get it nowadays," growled Sadie. "Still, opium's better than nothing."

A thrill ran through me. I was going to smoke opium! Julian murmured: "Don't smoke it, Little Bear, if you don't want to."

Sadie overheard him and cried out: "Little Bear! He calls her his Little Bear."

"Well, Ursula means 'little bear,'" said Julian, blushing. Everybody laughed, and Arf a Mo' asked whether he might snuggle up against the warm fur of the little bear. Henceforth I was called Little Bear, and it took me some time to get used to the poor jokes that were made over the spelling of the word "bear."

The eight of us disposed ourselves to smoke. Bill Gordon, having refused to take part, was given the job of making the pills.

The pipes were loaded, the light was dimmed.

"Don't pull too fast," said Julian. "Very slowly. Breathe in through the mouth and breathe out through your nose. There, not so fast. That's right."

"Shut up!" said The Woman, in a hushed voice, and by degrees the movements on the divans ceased. There was no rustling of skirts. Only regular breathing could be heard as they composed themselves into quietude. Julian had laid his cheek upon my shoulder, and I could only just see him, his eyes half open under veined eyelids. He frightened me. Could he be asleep already? For I felt nothing at all. So I jogged him with my elbow. He smiled and whispered:

"What's the matter, Little Bear? Do you want to stop?"

"No. I'm frightened, but I want to go on just to see what it's like."

"Oh, do shut up!" said The Woman again, wearily.

It took three pipes to affect me at all, and even so I was wakeful, highly conscious of what was going on. Arf a Mo' lay in the arms of Ida Quin, cheek to cheek and pipes touching. One could see hardly any smoke, but only a haze. It seemed to go on for a long time. Nothing happened except that now and then a hand rose languidly into the haze, moving its pipe. I had a vision of Bill Gordon getting up then and substituting another pipe. He seemed rather larger than before, but beyond that I felt nothing. Time began to grow immaterial. I felt a little cold. I did not want to move. A vague dream formed in my mind. Was I asleep?

IV

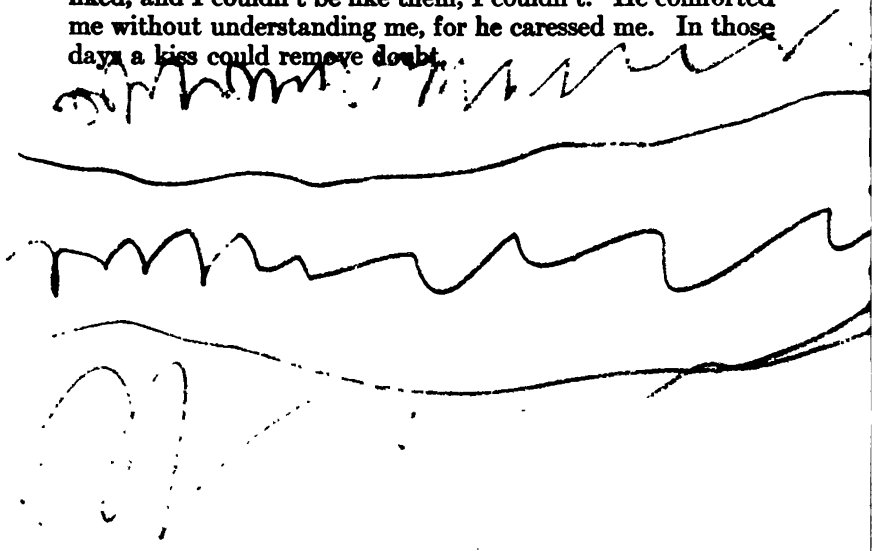
It was very silent everywhere now. Probably it was very late, three or four in the morning. In my half sleep I realized that Starnberg was holding my arm above the elbow. I lay almost on his shoulder. When I realized this my energy returned; I struggled. After a time he opened pearly-gray eyes and with difficulty whispered: "I sha'n't hurt you, Little Bear." I don't know why I ceased to struggle, unless I was too stupefied. A little later I observed Julian. He was

so affected that I had to take his arm and put it about me. As it fell limply I grew frightened and staggered up from the box couch. The room was very dim as I swayed into the middle of it, among forms equally dim. Only Bill Gordon had fallen asleep, cross-legged, his head against the divan. As I saw him, so fair, so round, so healthy, I was ashamed of my association with those dim bodies lying on the couches, bodies that dreamt, that for a moment had escaped ordinary life. It was terrible. They lay so still, a little pale, their mouths open, breathing fast. They did not look happy, for their features were a little awry. Julian! Suppose he'd overdone it! Suppose he was dead! I dragged him up by the shoulders. He stared at me, blinking, but he was not quite asleep, for he let me help him across the room. We floundered into the hall. I opened a door before I found the bathroom. I had only one idea in my mind—to wake him, to restore him, for him to be once more my wayward, smiling demigod. I remember thinking, as I cried a little and dashed water over his face: "Oh, this isn't the life for me. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

I got him downstairs; I felt sick, I felt ill. The scene was imprinted on my mind; I couldn't get away from it. As I propped him up across Leicester Square, irrelevant questions came to me. Did men like women of a class less than theirs because it enhanced their sense of superiority? I thought "yes," and dwelt on it in my vague state, as if it was immensely important. As I led Julian along, he a little restored by the cold, these questions seemed enormous; the opium magnified thoughts into material greenish shapes. Yet I understood with incredible lucidity. I saw all this as an evidence of despair; I saw that men fled to strange pleasures because they had ceased to believe in simplicity and were running away.

I can't remember any more. Only that for another hour the enormous shapes illumined by bright ideas occupied me. I was too unhappy to remember much more. In the flat Julian was almost normal, and he couldn't understand why

I burst into tears in his arms, crying that he couldn't love me, that I wasn't his sort, that those were the people he liked, and I couldn't be like them, I couldn't. He comforted me without understanding me, for he caressed me. In those days a kiss could remove doubt.



Chapter III

Developing

I

I CAN laugh at myself now when I reverse the film and see myself as I was then, the little white goose, as Julian called me until he invented Little Bear. Such a child, and only fifteen months out of home! But these fifteen hurried months had made up a confused past. I suppose it was natural enough that I should feel secure and hard, for it is not usual that in fifteen months a girl should have been secretary to a novelist, clerk in a drapery, manicurist, that she should have forfeited her innocence, lost its conqueror, and within that short time come to provisional finality.

That sounds like an Irish bull, but then, in life, finality is only an appearance. It is merely a black cloth, say a pleasant prospect in the country, or the mansion of a duke. You settle down to lean over a stile, or to sip tea. And before you know it the stage hands have snatched away the stile, removed your half-empty cup, and they're running about, the stage manager yelling, the carpenter driving nails. You stand bewildered while the scene changes; already about you they're putting up another set. Life is a tragi-comedy in many acts, and you've got to look sharp or you'll miss your cue.

The Ursula Quin of that time—yes, Ursula Quin, I signed it quite naturally to tradesmen, while to almost everybody else I signed Ursula, or Little Bear—offered a strange contrast with the Ursula Trent who had passed on her way to the conquest of London, owner of forty pounds and of a cargo of hopes. I wasn't exactly conquering London, except that I was living comfortably enough, excitedly enough, in

the only London that counts. It's queer to me, when now I look through my window at the gawky hollyhocks as they shed their pink cockades, that in those days my London, from the Park to the Strand, was only a couple of miles long. But then I was in love, and it would not have been wonderful if London had seemed only as long as Dover Street. Lovers make a selfish world, each woman a desert island with her Man Friday. But Man Friday insists upon climbing hills and lighting beacons; he is happy on the island, but he can't help signaling to the ships that may pass. Man wants love eternal, and eternal change. Oh, I don't mean that Julian wasn't nice to me. He was charming, gay, solicitous; he responded to those unruly impulses of mine that demand of a man the immolation of his vigor. He was adorable, but he did love making frocks. If only he had thought more of making money; if frocks had meant to him only good commissions, I'd have liked that. But he often returned puzzled as to whether he should use crêpe georgette or crêpe suzette, and forget all about my own crêpe. He was an artist, and it's terrible, living with an artist. They so seldom notice you except when something is wrong with their artistic emotions; then they grumble. I contradict myself, I know; he *was* charming, he *was* solicitous, he *did* love me, but it's all so contradictory, analyzing the emotion. It's never as one thinks it is, or was as it will be.

I knew a little more about Julian then, though he was secretive. His name was not Julian; he had to confess that when I found a very frayed old collar behind the wardrobe, where he had thrown it a couple of years before. (This provided me with bitter criticism when I invited Beatrice to confess when the last spring cleaning took place.) Oh, these men! They live in dirt. The next spring cleaning, I remember, provided my first quarrel with Julian. He wanted to know what it mattered if the dust was all *under* the carpets. Men! Anyhow, the old collar was marked A. Q. He was annoyed because I said, encouragingly, "Do own up, Albert."

"My name's not Albert," he snarled.

"Alfred? Or what about Adolphus? No. You don't look like an Adolphus. Can it be Anastasius? Or Athelstan?"

"Oh, do shut up!" said Julian. "I don't like my name. That's all there is to it. And how do I know your name's Ursula?"

I could not get it out of him. He was vain about that sort of thing. So it must have been Albert. Albert wasn't so romantic as Julian, of course, but I'd still have loved him a little. He had a mother, too, who lived in the country. Later, it seemed, she lived near London, in North London. I extracted from him that it was near Highbury. Evidently he never went near her. He and his sister never saw their relatives. I understand him better now. I realize Julian and Ida as the clever children of a lower middle-class family, who had taken from their education that which was superficially useful, in whom a sort of cockney intelligence had developed shallow brilliancy. Even now I don't know what he had done in his first dozen years of manhood. Some instinct brought him to associate with the public-school product, and he had achieved an extraordinary imitation, tempered by his taste for colors and lines.

What a fool and snob I still am to worry about these things! Wherever he came from, he was still charming. What more could I want? But lovers are greedy; they want to know everything of each other, so that they may possess each other entirely.

He was giving me a good life. How much he earned I don't know; probably in salary and commission a couple of thousand a year, and, as he was reckless, we enjoyed ourselves. Not only did I have all the frocks I wanted, and enough in my purse to take a friend to lunch at my favorite Berkeley, but we went about. Almost every night we went to a dance club or to the theater. Also, some of the people we knew could generally give us a couple of stalls. When we had nothing to do, we either went to the cinema, or rang the bell of friendly flats until we found somebody at home. I liked going to the cinema then. We didn't go as outsiders.

We knew the people in the trade; we saw the film that Mr. Satterthwaite had been talking of, or we witnessed our own Sadie, or Christine, posturing in a play. Sadie was rather too worn, I thought, to have her magnified features flashed on the screen.

Also, I was penetrating into the complex affairs of my own acquaintances. I knew now that The Woman despaired of conquering Gordon's affections, because he placed love a long way behind ambition; he could seldom be induced to forget that he was in training. I came to know that Pawlett had practically given up Sadie, and that their appearances together in restaurants were of a formal character. Indeed, he was more often with Christine Waldron, while Miltiades continued negligently to follow his flighty mistress, smoking cigars and thinking of something else. Also, there were in our set standard subjects, such as the Bentham menage. Both were actors. Roderick Bentham was extraordinarily good-looking in a mulish way, while his wife, Ninette, had the most beautiful dark-red hair that I have ever seen, and a skin like cream. Her bright green eyes burned like emeralds. They were very unhappy; it was known that this delicate-looking actor knocked his wife about, tortured her in secret, cruel ways that showed no marks. One saw that Ninette's eyes were often surrounded by a mauve aura left by tears, and that Walter Slindon sometimes uttered threats against Roderick.

"If she didn't love him still," he confided to me once, "I'd knock his head off. No"—his voice became ghoulish—"I wouldn't do that. I'd tie him up and cut him to pieces. I'd do slow things to him, things that took time, with acids and pocket knives."

"Don't be horrid," I said. "He's done you no harm. Besides, perhaps it isn't true."

Slindon did not reply; I understood that he felt too much to deliver himself to a stranger. He was a queer person. One would not have thought that a revue writer, rather over forty, with a pasty complexion and a ragged yellow mustache, could conceive such an ideal passion. Walter

Slindon loved Ninette so wholly, so quietly, and so hopelessly, that even in our set people didn't laugh at him. He was, I felt, the perfect knight, and it was terrible to think that he could not tilt against the dragon who held his lady, because in her folly she still seemed to care for the handsome Roderick.

Eddies! That was our world. In one eddy I can see Tootoo whirling, her fair hair malignantly curling before the eyes of Lewis Appleford, who persistently asked her to marry him, but whom she regularly refused. She went about with him, all the same, in no flirtatious spirit, but because she was too frigid to admit the possibility of a self-surrender. I perceived other emotional eddies, such as the one where Ida Quin played with Harry Lockwood. She talked to me about it once.

"Harry's all right," she said. "I needn't talk pi to you, need I? Only, he's got to do something for me."

"But you don't? . . ." I began, then stopped. Obviously Ida wouldn't take money from a man.

"Wouldn't what?"

"Never mind. Go on," I said.

"Well, I mean, there's Harry with three theaters in his hands, and here's little me wanting a job. I don't mind him; I rather like him. But if he can't get me a part, he can't be very fond of me."

"I see," I said.

"Of course," said Ida, indignantly, "I do like him, I really do."

I believe she really did. Ida was rather like Vera Westley. If a man gave Vera money she loved him. Ida was more grasping. Then there were the maneuvers of Karl Meerbrook. He was rather a pest, because his new light opera embodied a chance in his method; whenever he encountered a piano he insisted on playing portions that illustrated his new impulse. I heard many rumors of Meerbrook's opera. He wanted Starnberg to stage it, but the American would not commit himself, and news came as diplomatic hints. Sadie was doing something or other. Julian had had lunch

with Starnberg, never mind why. I'd see by and by. It was exciting. Money and passion were so intermingled in our world that one never knew which one influenced the other. The only one who didn't trouble was Lord Alfred Lydbrook. He had all the characteristics of the gentleman and the bookmaker; he laughed at Tootoo's schemes, told Christine and Sadie that Pawlett loved only her, informed Meerbrook that his music was tripe, and, taking a fancy to me, gave me an emerald pendant, without even asking for leave to slip it round my neck. Arf a Mo' was right; Lord Alfred was a card.

II

I was getting used to these new ways and these new clothes. Also, I took more coolly the accompaniments of my new position. I was fair game now, though everybody addressed my envelopes to Mrs. Quin. They knew I was . . . an understudy. It was not only opium had enabled Starnberg to hold my hand half-unrebuked; it was a laxness arising from the surroundings where people so swiftly came together and apart, where love did exist, but where passion reigned, where money crept in to corrupt and glorify. So for some time I was amused by an elderly man called Sir Charles Baldwin, who was, as Lady Edderton used to put it, "black as a new knight." Pepper-and-salt rather than black, perhaps, but presentable, with his hair cut rather too close because he wanted to look military, his clothes excellent, but always a little too new, and a head voice a little too good, which occasionally betrayed him into a rather artificial "Eh, what?" He had made his money in plush. The war found him well-to-do and left him incalculably rich. So he left Manchester, where Lady Baldwin, married a little too early to carry off her ladyship as Sir Charles would have had it, controlled a large house in the suburbs, and equally large boys and girls. She never came to town; so Sir Charles, having taken a flat in Piccadilly, decided to patronize the arts. That is to say, he gave expensive meals to anybody who painted, wrote, and especially to people connected with the theater. At

bottom, everything except the theater and the cinema rather worried him.

"These writing chaps," he confided to me suddenly, "you never know what they're getting at. My idea is they're getting at *you*, and you don't quite know it. Eh, what? Course, some of them are all right. I met F. M. Key the other day. He's a perfect gentleman. But somebody brought along to the Ritz, the other day, a fellow that was all hair, and it hadn't been combed since it started growing. Sat there in brown tweeds. I thought he'd get turned out, but what could I do? Tootoo brought him along; guess she met him in the tube. But I had to stop him smoking a pipe. I tell you, Mrs. Quin, those fellows, they don't get the hang of the Ritz. Eh, what? Give me the theater lot."

"Yes, they're friendlier, aren't they?"

Sir Charles dilated upon theatrical charms. Such good fellows! Such ripping girls! No nonsense about 'em! Nothing high-brow about 'em. He soon gave up the writers, and later on the painters and sculptors. Probably this had to do with his bust by Friedland.

"Don't know what the fellow meant by it," he fumed. "When I went to him and told him that I looked as if I was going to be hung, do you know what he said? It's no good your guessing; he said he was a sculptor of souls."

I laughed. I couldn't help it. I had a vision of Sir Charles's soul.

"It's all very well laughing. I tell you, Mrs. Quin, I don't believe in monkeying about with souls. It isn't done. Eh, what? Anyhow, I told him I wouldn't pay for it and he could sue me. Of course he didn't. Those fellows never have any money. Can't go into court against people like me. But he took it out of me all the same; had the thing photographed and circulated it in all the papers."

"But couldn't you interfere?"

"No. My lawyer said that it was his copyright, and advised me to buy it. I'll see him damned first. You don't get round Charlie B. by making a caricature of his soul. But you wait. I'll see him in the gutter yet."

His callous feelings were rather frightening. I knew that he would be pitiless, but he admired me and did not conceal his admiration, so I couldn't help liking him a little.

It was men like Sir Charles made me feel the difficulty of modern dressing. I hadn't thought of it until one evening Walter Slindon said to me, "I do wish you women wouldn't undress so much to dance."

"Why not? Don't you like it, you rude man?"

"Of course I do, and that's the trouble. With this panorama of arm and shoulder, to say nothing of the rest, one simply doesn't know where to look. You see, one doesn't want to be indiscreet."

I smiled, and almost squeezed his hand as we danced. He was really rather sweet, this ugly, middle-aged idealist. Sir Charles was very different. He had, well . . . an X-ray eye. When he stared at me I always felt dressed in tulle. It was terrifying. Sir Charles always got his own way in business. What would I do if in his eyes I acquired the importance of a deal?

We're funny, we women. In the evening we wear as little as we can, and we're offended if anybody notices it. We find a man's eyes resting upon us, and more or less say, "How dare you?" We're extraordinarily modest until convention legalizes a new exposure. For instance, at my coming-out ball, twelve years ago, I did not see a single frock that revealed the armpit; I would have been horrified if the new frocks, stopping halfway up the flank, had then been shown me. I began by being self-conscious when I wore them, but as the others wore the same I thought no more about it. It isn't fair to the men; it makes them shy. And we're so unreasonable; we cut our frocks down to the waist; after that we tell one another in horrified whispers: "Don't dance with that man. Do you know . . . he had the cheek to put his hand on my back." "What an outsider!" says the other woman. I am not sure that man isn't the modest sex, whatever modesty may be. Even Julian was embarrassed if I stayed in the room while he was dressing for dinner. They're not used to it, I suppose. Or perhaps they don't

trust themselves as we do; they aren't so sure of being agreeable to our eye. We are always quite sure; often it's a pity we are.

III

I thought I knew my Julian now. He seemed single-minded, and to have very little in his life except his work and me. He played no games; in fact he cared little for exercise. He must have played games once upon a time, but he refused to talk of them, probably because he had not been to a university and did not care to say so. His work was his main pleasure; the flat was perpetually littered with strips of material that he was experimenting with, designs, and fragments of trimmings. He worked with the help of dolls, and I think we came closer together because I entered into this pastime and worked with him; I made fantastic clothes for these creatures twelve inches high. I smile at myself a little sorrowfully as I remember myself in the evenings, very serious, my head bent over the table, close to his, as I cut out gold tissue for a court train.

"Good," says Julian. "We'll call that 'The Profiteer.' And you might think of something in sackcloth with a trimming of ashes; we'll call that 'The New Poor.'"

We laughed and made love a great deal while we created those frocks, some of which Julian eventually reproduced on the human scale. It was rather exciting, and I had a success with an undergarment that began with lace at the top and ended as a crêpe-de-Chine petticoat. Julian made me shy by carrying it about for several days and showing it to all our acquaintances.

"Look at Little Bear's invention," he would say. "The blouse chemise. Put on a skirt, and there you are, ready to lunch at Jules's. Take off the skirt and there you are, still ready."

"Don't call it the blouse chemise," said Arf a Mo'. "Call it 'A Little Bear'; that 'll be complimentary and true."

Finally the doll was given to a charity bazaar and realized

an enormous price, thanks to Julian's signature. I didn't like that much.

"Why not?" he said. "It advertises me."

"Yes, I know," I replied, not quite realizing my own repulsion. Then I found it. "I mean, you're selling something."

"Well, I sell frocks all day."

"Not your own frocks. You only design them, Julian."

He laughed as he understood. "Oh, you mean it's trade, whereas if I only design I'm professional."

I felt rather ashamed of myself. Ursula Trent of Ciber Court was such a long time dying. That particular Ursula was also much annoyed by another incident. Julian had made friends with the art editor of an illustrated weekly, I forget which. A few weeks later there appeared a full-page set of photographs of Julian engaged in dressing a statue of Diana in modern clothes. The first picture was awful. He was standing by the statue, holding her hand, and looking at her with an air of idiotic adoration. (Was I a little jealous?) In the second he was making the goddess absurd with chemise and stays. Camisole and petticoat followed, then dance frock. But the fifth picture was just dreadful; he was making her up. In the sixth, the goddess had eyebrows, flushed cheeks, a salved mouth; on her scragged hair rested one of those lovely little shiny straws that look like a man's bowler hat.

"Don't you like it?" asked Julian. As I did not reply, "Don't you think she looks charming?"

"Yes."

"Not exactly the virgin goddess, don't you think?" Then he perceived my irritation and pressed me to confess. At last he found out that I did not like public mummery. That was all he could understand. I could not manage to get out that the Trents of Ciber Court don't like being advertised.

Chapter IV

Suspicion

I

AS we were walking along Piccadilly, one Saturday afternoon, we met Sadie, who was gazing into the windows of Hatchard's.

"How now?" said Julian, taking her by the elbow. "Are you going to improve your mind? What's your fancy? *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*"?

She looked at us vaguely. "Hullo! Where are you two off to?" Without letting us reply: "It's four o'clock. Come and have tea."

"Right-o!" said Julian. We followed her down a side street into one of those little underground places where the chairs are placed two and two, where a temporary Garden of Eden is contrived by screens, and serpentine temptation is impersonated by a discreet waitress.

"What's the matter?" said Julian, after a moment, for Sadie was silent. A look of strain was on her face.

"Matter? Same old game—Pawlett again."

"Oh!" I said. "I thought you said you didn't care for him."

"Care about him, the swine! Course I don't care about him. But I won't have him giving me the chuck."

"Now, Sadie," said Julian, soothing, "don't be absurd. He hasn't given you the chuck."

"No," said Sadie, ferociously, "he hasn't, because he's not sure of Christine yet. He's only keeping me to make the pace."

"Look here, old girl," he said, "don't think I'm going to be sorry for you, or anything rotten like that. Perhaps it

isn't as bad as you think. I don't think he's really after Christine, any more than he's after anybody else."

"Don't you think so?" said Sadie, anxious to believe him.

"Of course I think so. How long have you been together?"

"Four years."

"Well, then, he's not going to quit as easy as all that. I think it 'd be a rotten thing for him to do."

"I'll drown myself if he does."

"Oh no, you won't, Sadie. It 'd be a waste to drown a pretty woman like you."

She smiled rather sadly. "You may think that, but what does Pawlett think?"

"He thinks just as I do. Let me talk to him."

"Oh, I couldn't! I'm not going to have any favors asked."

"I won't ask favors, you silly kid," said Julian. "Only he could be made to understand." He went on talking for a long time, and more and more Sadie fell under the sway of the charming voice that said optimistic things. Julian began to advise her. She must adopt those characteristics which in her rival attracted Mr. Pawlett. Christine had the gift of lovely silences, which arose from the fact that she never had an idea. Well, Sadie must afford Mr. Pawlett lovely silences. Christine looked lovely in green, but Sadie looked lovely in blue. Christine played the piano rather well; Sadie could sing.

"Oh dear!" she said at last, as we rose, "you *are* nice to me," and looked at him so fondly that I was a little annoyed. I liked him being nice to her; he was very sweet, and very kind, and so understanding; of course this moved Sadie. It frightened me. Other women must find him as adorable as I did.

"Oh dear! what a fright I look!" said Sadie, taking out her mirror and powder puff. She finished the operation, salved her mouth, ordered her hair. We walked out, chattering. In a quarter of an hour he had restored her pride.

II

We saw a good deal of Sadie just then, for we were the only people who had helped her; so she had no reason to be

ashamed. We were her confessors; indeed, we got a little too much of her, for women who have love troubles are intolerably proud of them. They feel that they are heroines in a drama, and they want to perform. Also, they are most egotistic. Their trouble blots out the rest of the world. It cannot occur to them that others lend only languid interest to these things, that sympathy transmutes itself into contempt. I began by being sorry for Sadie. I went on to think her a poor thing, to despise her. It was so undignified to cling to her fugitive relationship.

We need not have bothered to keep our sympathy secret, for everybody was half amused by the affair and seemed to guess as much as we knew. Karl Meerbrook, who came to dinner, was as pro-Christine as we were pro-Sadie, and brought news from the other front. We did not often ask people to dinner; indeed, we seldom dined at the flat, because the cooking was poor and somehow things got cold. But this was a rainy evening, and Meerbrook had come in with Julian. During most of dinner the talk was of Sadie, but when the two men settled to their cigars Meerbrook grew expansive on the subject of his light opera. He had, it seemed, ambitions. Meerbrook was a small, rather stout little dark man, with the large features and intelligent hands of the musician. His light opera was very precious to him.

"You know," he said, suddenly, "it's all very well going on like this, year after year, doing music that 'll show off a leg, but one gets sick of it. Sick of it," he repeated, ferociously. "Nice, jingly little tunes that Bert and Mybel can pick up and whistle. Make it catchy! Give us a bit of variety! I can hear those swines of managers, that don't know a sonata from a snore. 'Give it a bit of life, Karl. We don't want any of your damned *leitmotifs*. What you want to dish up that tune again what you had in Act One? What's the ideer, Karl?' Ah! in their own words, they give me the sick."

We laughed. "Surely it isn't as bad as all that," said Julian. "They've let you do charming things. What's wrong with 'Gloria'?"

"Oh, 'Gloria'!" said Meerbrook, bitterly. "You should have seen the score before they started messing about with it. Before they cut out the quartet in Act Two, and before they made me shove in three songs for that white cow of a Bella Thursby. It's murder, I tell you. Of course it pays. But that isn't what I wanted to do. When I was a kid, I remember coming back from school and walking along the Bethnal Green Road, drunk. Drunk, with the song in my head, a thing that swelled like a hundred organs. I've half forgotten it. The motorbuses have drowned it. Only now and then it gets through the buses. I stop before the fountain in the Circus, and the flower sellers for a moment are dressed up in pink brocade, while Cupid with a lute plays . . . oh, like Locatelli, like Couperin—anybody—until a conductor shouts: 'No, lidy! This don't go ter Camberwell. Try the Twelve A.' O God!"

We were silent for a moment. Julian looked curiously at this absurd, hysterical figure with its face buried in its hands. As for me, I supposed musicians were like that, but his passion shook me. I liked the shameless revelation of his origins, this spirit in prison. For a moment, this writer of occasional music, this catchy firefly, was to me a great musician. He raised his head, smiled at us, half ashamed.

"What rot I talk! One's got to live." He grew serious. "But perhaps you think I'm just talking nonsense. I'm not. This new thing of mine, I don't know whether it's good, but there isn't a moment when somebody can bellow, 'Girls!' (upon which enter twenty-four seminudes). Opportunities for other girls than the prima donna. No chance for Harry Tate's mustache. It's music, my boy, music. What it's worth, I don't know. . . ." He threw up his hands. "It's the best I can do. Like to hear some of it?"

He looked triumphant and afraid, like a dog frisking for a walk, that may be left behind.

"Go ahead," said Julian, settling to his cigar. As he spoke Meerbrook went to the piano, struck a few chords, grumbled. "Damn the pitch. Why do you have it so high? This damned French pitch." At last he began to play, com-

menting as he went, "Tinkle, tinkle, that's the overture . . . played in the dark, of course. . . ." He said nothing for a moment. Then, "Now, mark the oboe." I caught a grin of delight upon his features. I was enormously impressed, though the music was charming rather than profound. It was, well, how shall I put it? Dance music that had been laid up in lavender so long that it had refined itself down into a sort of pattern. I saw what he meant by lutes and pink brocade.

He played two arias and a chorus out of the first act, jumping up and down upon his stool, wild with excitement. He kicked the piano after breaking down in the middle of the quintet at the end of the second act, where a more solid note was found that did not "get me," until he played what he called the twentieth-seventeenth-century music of the third act. It was perfectly delicious. I can define it only by calling it ragtime arranged by Bach. He had picked out the syncopation by means of successive trebles, interjecting at intervals what I cannot explain because I know no harmony, joyful and unexpected chords. He ended up magnificently with a combination of crashing bass notes (presumably brass), lightened up by trumpets. At least so he shouted excitedly, while he played, perspiring abundantly, and at last leaping off the piano stool to collapse in an armchair, wiping his head and hysterically begging us to say that it was all right.

"I think it's lovely," I said. "And so fresh."

"Do you think they'll stage it?"

"Anyhow, it's original," said Julian.

"Do you think they'll stage it?" repeated Meerbrook, taut with anxiety.

"Of course it 'll get on," I said. "After all, you're very well known."

"Mind you," said Julian, "it 'll depend a lot upon the producer. The Sicilian scene will have to be well done if it isn't to look like Earl's Court, or even Covent Garden. And the dresses 'll have to be good."

"Of course," said Meerbrook. "But you can be sure

that I'm not going to hand it over to any damn fool. If I can find anybody," he added, miserably.

"You're sure to find somebody," I said. "Why not offer it to Mr. Starnberg?"

"He won't touch it. Says it's art. Which is his way of saying, 'Off with its head.'"

"I suppose you've talked to Lockwood?" remarked Julian.

"Oh, Lockwood! Tcha! Lockwood says (you know his oily way), 'I should be only too utterly delighted, Mr. Meerbrook, only you do not provide the spectacular opportunities in which generally your genius is so fecund.' Oh, the swine! I like Starnberg better. At least you can tell what he is from his grunt." Despair overwhelmed him. "It will never get on. I shall never do any good. This country is done for. I'd better go back and write *revue* music; something like 'Upsidedown' or 'Insideout.'" He looked about to weep.

Then Julian said: "Oh, I don't know. Not if it was well dressed."

"Damn it all!" cried Meerbrook, hysterically. "You seem to think only the dresses matter."

"Well, you think only the music matters."

I had to laugh at the two rival artists, but by degrees I perceived that something else was happening, for Julian repeated:

"If the manager understood how it would be staged and how it might be dressed, he might look at it differently."

"Manager? I've seen them all."

"If there isn't a manager," said Julian, smoothly, "one must create a manager. Yesterday a man was a capitalist; to-day he's a manager; to-morrow he's a bankrupt."

"Do you suggest that my opera would bankrupt . . ."

"Don't be absurd. A capitalist can be got."

"I don't know any capitalists."

"No more do I. Still, in my profession one meets a lot of rich women. Some are very pretty, and their husbands are weak." He paused, and added, meditatively: "I should

like to dress an opera, to have a really big job, say sixty costumes. Your opera should run to that, shouldn't it?"

"Not quite. Twenty-two characters, and three acts; well . . . say forty."

"Ah!" said Julian, "it would be fun. If only one could find the capitalist."

Meerbrook stared at him for a moment and suddenly said: "Look here, if you get that play staged you shall have the dressing. I'll make it a condition of my contract and put it in writing to you."

Then I felt that Julian had brought Meerbrook to suggest the thing that he himself would have proposed. Rather cleverly, he seemed to hesitate. "Oh! It hadn't struck me like that, Karl. You see, it's not exactly in my line to get hold of capital."

"I wish you would," said Meerbrook, imploringly. "If this thing isn't staged I shall . . . drown myself."

"I don't want you to do that," said Julian. "I'll try. Anyhow, on the chance of my bringing it off, let me have a letter to that effect when you get home to-night. That can't do any harm, can it?"

III

It was ten o'clock. We decided to go to a cinema. We couldn't go to bed at ten. As I followed the men, who elaborated their scheme, I felt a certain resentment against Julian. His excessive cleverness was almost unpleasant when contrasted with the ebullient sincerity of the musician. "Stealing a child's penny," I thought. Then I told myself not to be a fool and that business was business. But the Trents aren't good at business; it took me some time to sort out that I didn't mind Julian selling clothes, but that I did mind his forcing the musician to accept his clothes by offering him a service of another kind. Then I forgot all about it. After all, business was business, and Julian took my arm. I laid my shoulder against his.

Of course, we went to one of Satterthwaite's cinemas, the

big one near the Haymarket. At the doors we had a wrangle, for Meerbrook obstinately refused to let us pay, declaring that he only had to ring up Montmorency and we'd get in free. The girl at the pay box confirmed that Mr. Satterthwaite was upstairs, in the office of the company, where he spent eighteen hours a day. After a scrimmage Julian pushed Meerbrook away from the box, paid, and went in. I forget what I saw—sentimental things, I believe, for Satterthwaite liked the gentler side of human nature. Also, I was distracted by frequent bursts of conversation across me, who sat between the two men. After half an hour I then grew conscious of another disturbance. Next to Julian sat a fair girl whose profile I could just see in the dark. She was with another girl. I don't know what made me notice it, but after a time I observed that Julian laid his hand upon his knee. Her hand also lay on her knee. A little later I observed that Julian's hand was no longer to be seen. I called myself a fool, for the girl's hand still lay where it had been. What was I thinking of? Or was it a premonition? I told myself not to look, but at last I had to. I couldn't help it. No hands were to be seen. Savagely I told myself: "Well, if he is holding her hand, what does it matter? Anyhow, it isn't dignified to look." But just as the lights went up I had to look, of course! How silly of me. Julian was consulting his watch, while the girl read her program.

To this day I don't know what happened there, but I do know that for the first time I realized that Julian might be unfaithful to me, that craft might lie under his charming manner. My security was shaken. This blended with the disturbance caused by his finesse in the matter of dresses for the opera. Somehow he seemed less a demigod and merely an exquisite mortal.

These things go slowly. I did not think of them when we went up to see Satterthwaite after the show. I had never spoken to him before, and did not like this short, extremely stout, heavy, dark man, with enormous humid brown eyes, a heavy underlip, and a large tribal nose, set off by a pronounced baldness. He looked perfectly disgusting, and so I

was amazed to find that he had the softest and most caressing voice I've ever heard. "Oh, you are Little Bear, aren't you? Everybody says nice things about your looks, Mrs. Quin, and as a rule that means disappointment. I see that sometimes people don't exaggerate."

I laughed. I couldn't be offended by his crudity; the man was fifty, and when he smiled his features were sweet and paternal. Meerbrook made a fool of himself after a moment, and asked Satterthwaite whether he wouldn't like to mount a light opera as a change from cinemas. The manager shook his bald head and replied:

"No, Mr. Meerbrook. When your light opera comes on, I promise you I'll take twenty-four stalls on the first night, and I'll tell all my friends in the press to give you a show, but I must stick to my trade. I don't understand music."

"Oh, go on!" said Meerbrook. "Haven't I met you three times at a concert in the last month?"

"Yes," said Satterthwaite, nodding. "I don't understand music, but I love it. It makes me forget that I'm a fat old widower, since my Rebecca died, and that I've a quarrel with the landlord of my big house in Hampstead, and that my boy Reuben has got religion something dreadful and wants to be a rabbi, which doesn't pay."

We had to smile, but his simplicity was infinitely winning; he convulsed me by describing the difficulty he had had in finding a house that was large enough to accommodate what he called his "booffay."

"I wouldn't sell that," he said, "for any money. My poor Rebecca always arranged the fruit on it. Couldn't get it in at the door. Couldn't take it to pieces. You should have seen it when the crane was swinging it up from the garden to get it through the window. You know," he added, seriously, "a booffay that is nine feet long does not look dignified when it's swinging."

We laughed at him, but he was charming, and when at last he decided to leave his beloved office to take us out to supper, he entertained us for an hour by telling us the story of his life, from the day when he was a page boy at "Wonder-

land," in Whitechapel, to his tenance of "The Peep Show" in Tottenham Court Road, and now to his glory as a prominent member of the Cinema Exhibitors' Association. We heard about Rebecca, too. She had been a character, it seemed. When she married she refused to shave her head and wear a *scheitel*. "I should catch a cold if there was a fire, Montmorency," she used to say, "if I had to go out at night and my *scheitel* was lost." He spoke of his children, not only of Reuben, the regrettable candidate for rabbihood, but about Esther, who'd acquired bad habits as a suffragette and was now a socialist, and about Leopold, who was making lots of money in Chicago as a designer of wrappers for canned pork. He was ashamed of nothing, told us everything; the only subject he let alone was his conversion from Moses into Montmorency.

IV

Was it this agitation, I wonder, caused me, when I got home, to receive amicably an invitation from Sir Charles Baldwin to lunch with him at the Carlton? After all, it was the Carlton; it was not his flat. Why not? I did not go to sleep at once, and for some time considered the Baldwin proposal. It would not compromise me much, but three months before, in the first flush of coming together with Julian, I should have laughed at the old man. I was disturbed; the suspicion that Julian had held that girl's hand in the cinema worried me; though I liked Satterthwaite, he certainly was vulgar, and I resented being led by Julian into such society. I brooded for some time over these two grievances, turning over and over and feeling very hot. Then Julian's management of Meerbrook increased my irritation. He was mean, in a way. Then I called myself disloyal and silly. Then I felt remorseful, but at once changed my mind and told myself, "I *will* lunch with Sir Charles." Then I went to sleep at once, for my preoccupation had been allayed by a decisive act.

It wasn't so bad, lunching with Sir Charles. He did talk

a lot about himself and his wealth, and he bragged. He told me at lunch how he'd bought a car recently.

"I said to the fellow, 'How much?' Course, he started a song and dance about my having to pay a premium for early delivery. So I told him to cut the cackle. Eh, what! He said a thousand guineas, and I said, 'Well, you know, that's all very well for the mugs, but let's have your real price, right out.' He came down to seven hundred guineas at once. Course, he knew *me*. What about a run down to Brighton, you and me? Eh, what?"

I repelled the run down to Brighton. I love motoring, but I had an idea that there wouldn't be quite enough room in the car for Sir Charles, myself, and my self-respect. I had quite enough trouble as it was, for I'd been fool enough to tell him that, after lunch, I wanted to go to some glove people at the top of Bond Street. The car was waiting, so I couldn't say I'd rather taxi; as it was raining, I couldn't say I wanted to walk. I had to get in. The brute had fitted blinds to his car, but I managed to keep one of them up. He wasn't really violent; at last he contented himself with holding my hand and kissing my wrist above the glove, declaring that I was throwing myself away and that he was ready to give me a hell of a good time.

It disturbed me, all this. The new atmosphere, that had begun by being exciting, was becoming usual. Fantastic figures were more normal than they seemed. Sadie collected stamps; Arf a Mo' was a good golfer and got on very well with stockbrokers at Sandy Lodge. They were more normal than they seemed, and The Woman, I found, kept an old mother and an invalid sister at the seaside. All that made me like them better, but they were less impressive, and so I had less to keep my mind busy. Also, acidity arose with Julian over the maneuvers which I felt he was engaged in with regard to Meerbrook's opera. I discovered an unexpected streak of hardness in the beautiful creature.

"Get on or get out, Ursula, that's the motto." I was silent. When he called me Ursula he always liked me less than when he called me Little Bear.

"It's no good making a fuss about it. That's the way the world goes round. Meerbrook's an artist and no more; I'm an artist and a business man. That's going to give me a bit of a majority over him. Well, the world is governed by majorities, not only in politics; it's either a majority of votes, or a majority of cash, or a majority of brains. I'm going to take my majority in this world, and minorities must suffer. Besides, you talk as if I was going to do him down. Not a bit of it. I can do some good to Meerbrook, and it's right I should profit by it. Otherwise why should I do him good?"

I didn't like it. His voice was so gentle, his words were so harsh. Like a cat, that lovely, soft, yielding thing that turns into a bundle of steel wire when you try to coerce it. My social situation, too, worried me more, for, two nights before, I had met Uncle Victor at Compton's. It gave me an awful shock, though my smart Uncle Victor looked a little disarranged, as if he'd had a very good dinner. He was dancing with a frightful little girl, a manicurist whom none of us would have spoken to. Fancy me talking to a manicurist! He saw me. After a while he got away from the little girl and took me apart.

"Well, Ursula," he said, "how do you like life?"

"It's all right."

"Yes, you look all right. Charming frock. Charming girl. Wish I wasn't your uncle. Suppose I couldn't make a mistake?"

"Now, Uncle Victor," I said, "I'll have to scold you, and that would be hardly respectful, would it?"

He twinkled. "No, I suppose not, though it isn't always the people who have most right to do so who take on the job of censoring. I suppose we're all censors until we're found out."

We talked seriously, then; he inquired mainly after my present situation. Was I happy? Did I have everything I wanted? Was I disappointed with life? He did not reprove me. Uncle Victor was beautifully liberal. But he annoyed me, all the same. When I asked for news of my father and

mother he merely replied, "They're all right." And he introduced me to that horrid little girl, but wouldn't come over and be introduced to Julian. He made me feel so frightfully outcast, because, in spite of his disarranged tie, he was still a member of my class plunging into dissipation, while I lived in dissipation and, as I talked to him, strove to get out.

I cried when I got home, and would not tell Julian why I was unhappy. Perhaps I felt that he had no place in preoccupations of which, in a way, he was the innocent origin. I owned something apart from him, and that tended to part us. Oh, dear Julian! how unfair I am! I am letting memories of a later time interfere with the sweet picture of you as you were then. I was able then to take pleasures as they came, and I can't bring those pleasures up again, overlaid as they are by such miseries. What a pity! What waste! Why can't we take delights as they form and embalm them, so that we may preserve them forever as a monument of our past?

Chapter V

Contradictions

I

NINETTE BENTHAM had to use Ninette Douglas as a stage name because she had made her way as Ninette Douglas. But she loved her Roderick so much that she signed herself Bentham, which is almost incredible in an actress. One hears of such things more often than one meets them. Like Mr. Blackbrook, she liked being miserable. (Drama again? Are we all dramatic?) I think she asked me to come and see her play, and then on to tea at her flat, so that I might know that an actress can laugh and dance while her heart is bleeding. She wanted me to see her with the make-up off, and her heart, well . . . bleeding. I oughtn't to put it like that. I feel a cat, but I couldn't understand her. We sat there, we two, in this pleasant, idiotically furnished little flat near Bloomsbury Square. Though Ninette had red hair and green eyes, hers was the pale-blue temperament. She loved the works of Mrs. Vernham, and I think that the discovery that I had been secretary to the Great enhanced our friendship.

What a flat! Pale-blue flowered silk in white panels on the walls; occasional tables, without occasion; crowds of photographs, signed "Tommy," "Billy," or "Yours to a cinder, illegible." Lace curtains, little gilt chairs, a carpet on which clusters of roses were having fits. That flat did not look like lovely Ninette with her tragic green eyes and her flaming head. It looked like Tootoo's virtuous abode, somewhere in the suburbs, I believe, with mamma. Before tea came in Ninette was talking:

"Oh, Little Bear, don't you ever get married!" Pause, to enable me to ask why. I say, "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know! One gets married. One thinks everything in the garden 'll be lovely. But it isn't. Not always. Oh, Roddy's a darling, but I didn't think he'd turn out like that. Mind you, I'll say this for Roddy, he doesn't run after other women." More bitterly she added, "I suppose they wouldn't stick him if they had the luck to get hold of him."

I smiled at her paradox. How exactly it defined most of us with most men! They are impossible and necessary. But she went on.

"If only his temper wasn't so short. I don't know why. We're doing well; we're both playing just now. And Roddy got an awfully good contract. Forty pounds a week, my dear, and no kid about it. I'll show it you." Though I protested, she showed me Roddy's contract, then her contract, and vowed they weren't dummies. Her theatrical talk amused me; she exposed to me the practice of giving a vain actor a contract for forty pounds a week, together with another which amends it and is dated the following day; that one grants him only fifteen pounds, which enables him to exhibit the rich contract without expense to the management. But at once she returned to her grievance, munching muffins with perfect content.

"I don't know why he's like that. Just for nothing, because I've forgotten my little bag, or something, he calls me . . . oh! I wouldn't tell you what he calls me—things a man shouldn't say. And when he's rehearsing, if the producer says anything he asks me what I think about it. Of course I'm on his side, but it never seems to be enough. He says I'm getting at him, like the others. Says it's a conspiracy to keep him down. Well, of course I can't help standing up for myself, and then he knocks me about."

"But surely," I said, "it isn't really serious? I mean it's only impatience."

"Is it?" whispered Ninette, ghoulishly. "Why, only the other night . . . Look here, I'll show you."

"Please!" I said, for I hated this exhibition. She overwhelmed me.

I was really horrified. Everybody knew that Roddy beat his beautiful young wife, one didn't know why, but to see the marks was different. I was still used to knowing things but not to seeing them. And Ninette would go on, would horribly persist in telling me that he'd beaten her with a stick, that now and then he struck her suddenly, when they weren't quarreling, as if he enjoyed it.

"But, good heavens!" I said, at last, "why do you stay with him? You keep yourself; you make as much as he does, and they're talking of you as the coming leading lady. I wouldn't stay with a man like that a week."

"He's rather a dear," murmured Ninette.

She sickened me. I guessed that she liked Roddy's brutality. Still I maintained my point. "I should leave him."

"Oh, well, we're married!"

"I know, but all the same you didn't pledge yourself to him for better, for sorer, did you?"

She laughed. "You do say things," she remarked, comfortably. "Often I think I will go. I think I'll go now." Her anger increased. "I won't stand it! I won't! I won't! Look here, you help me to pack. I'll show him."

I thought this ridiculous, but as soon as we went to the bedroom and dragged out her clothes the bell rang. It was Walter Slindon.

"Oh dear," said Ninette, "here's Wally again. Well, I suppose we must give him tea." We left the bedroom. Walter Slindon had tea with us. A few minutes later Tootoo came in after the matinée. She and Ninette hated each other so completely that they went about a good deal together, each to keep an eye on the other's progress. New tea was brought in, with many cakes, for Ninette loved sweet things, especially cakes with pink icing. At once gossip began. Christine was still keeping off Mr. Pawlett; one wondered why. Christine wasn't exactly a debutante, and he could do her a lot of good.

"Holding out for something," said Ninette.

"She won't get it," said Tootoo. "She's got nothing to give."

There was a moment of silence, for everybody knew that in that sense Tootoo was economical. So, awkwardly, Slindon said:

"Well, how's Appleford?"

"He's very well, thank you," said Tootoo.

"When's the wedding?" asked Ninette.

"I haven't made up my mind," said Tootoo. Her small pink features, the features of a child, looked rather hard, I thought.

As we did not reply, she went on: "You're extraordinary, all you people. You all think that girls are thinking of nothing but getting married."

"What else is there to do?" said Ninette.

"I've given myself to my career," said Tootoo, solemnly.

"That's all right," said Ninette, "only you've got to catch that career before you lose your face."

"What's the matter with my face?" flamed Tootoo. She was so angry that she added, "Nobody spoils it for me."

"How dare you!" cried Ninette, jumping up, her voice full of tears. She appealed to us. "What have I done to have things like this said to me in my own house? Just because I'm unhappy, and everybody knows it, and everybody discusses my affairs, she thinks she can insult me, trample on me! Oh, I'm so unhappy!"

Tootoo looked ashamed. Then I realized a new Walter Slindon. Leaning forward, he took Ninette's hands, drew her head down upon his shoulder, and there let her cry, only from time to time murmuring, "There, don't cry." Or, "Don't cry, my pretty." I nearly cried myself then. It was touching to see this awkward, middle-aged man comforting the foolish, charming woman. He was beautifully careless of Tootoo and me. Another would have been self-conscious. Suddenly Ninette stopped crying, and at once Tootoo kissed her.

"I'm a beast," she said. "I do say things." Rather subtly

she added, "Only I'm so beastly jealous of you because you're beautiful and I'm only pretty."

"Oh, rot!" said Ninette, immediately soothed, and powdering her nose hard. "Have an éclair? Seen Sadie lately?"

We discussed Sadie, who was now going round telling her miseries to everybody. This led once more to Ninette's miseries, once more to the description of her husband's brutality. But for Slindon, she would have shown her bruises again.

"Don't you think I ought to leave him?" she said to all of us, having evidently forgotten that she was going to pack.

"You never ought to have married him," said Tootoo, coldly. "He wasn't doing well enough. You can't believe what men say to you, Ninette. Mr. Appleford, for instance. It's all very well his being the son of a peer, but it's an Irish peer, and I've got a friend in the civil service that's looking out how much the family got for their land when they sold it under that Irish Act. You know what I mean?"

We none of us knew what Tootoo meant; we weren't so technical, but we did know that she would do good business. I repeated that Ninette ought to leave her husband, and Tootoo backed me up. Only Walter Slindon was against us.

"Oh, it's all very well leaving a man, Ninette, but if you do you leave all your dreams behind."

"More like nightmares," said Ninette.

"Well, it starts with dreams, all the things you hoped to find in each other, all the early lovemaking, and all the folly. While you're together you've still got that; you can find those memories any time in the ashes of the dead happiness. But if you leave him you've got to start again, with some one else, or be alone. And it's hell to be alone, and so you go to somebody else; you go there older, a bit worn, a bit cynical. You can't collect a new lot of dreams, and, you see, people can only live by dreams. Reality's too hard. So stick to him, Ninette, unless it gets too bad. You can stick it, can't you?"

"Yes," said Ninette, tearfully, "but I don't want to."

Slindon jumped up and agitatedly walked to the window.

"Good heavens!" he said. "Do you think I want you to stay with him when . . . Oh, damn! Here, Little Bear, you going my way?"

I followed him. We walked together down Shaftesbury Avenue and on to Green Park. His outburst had upset me, for it had revealed to me what was reported, that Walter Slindon was in love with Ninette, that he had wanted to marry her before Roderick Bentham came along with his beautiful, cruel face. The *revue* writer had a sweet, rather sentimental temperament, and he could not bear to think that his adored Ninette should be soiled in the divorce court, even for his sake.

"You may think it queer," he said to me, giving a little of his confidence, "but I can't help thinking a woman had better suffer rather than go down into the gutter."

I knew what he meant. I liked him, and I was sorry for him. We talked for a long time of other things, of people we knew, notably of Lord Alfred Lydbrook. Lord Alfred really was a brick.

"He's one of the best," said Slindon. "People don't know what he does. For instance, that business of Frills."

"Oh, I know all about Frills," I said. "Lord Alfred lends her his car."

"Yes. And doesn't she need it! The poor little thing doesn't get much for her fashion notes, and she's got to dress and go about a lot to keep a sick husband and four children. Lord Alfred doesn't offer her money; a thing like that would stick in her gullet. I know; she's that sort. He lends her a car, lets her earn her own living. Though, mind you, he's free with his money, too. You know about Frills, but I bet you don't know about Madame de Louviers's old mother."

"No."

"Well, the beauty shop doesn't pay very well, and madame's old mother's got to be kept somewhere. So Lord Alfred's found a cottage he didn't want in a corner of his estate."

We talked a little more of Ninette, and Slindon, though he

would not confide entirely, exhibited to me an agonized spirit. He couldn't bear to see his beloved tortured by another man; yet he could not have borne so to see her happy; again, he could not bear to take her away from her wretchedness, to make of her a woman like her own friends, like me. He didn't mean that exactly, but he wanted her as she was, alabaster pure, and he could attain her only through what he considered secretly to be impurity. So he could only love her, cheer her, and maintain her misery, so that she might remain his dream. He was very lovable, this man, like Lord Alfred, in another way. Strange world I lived in; my acquaintances knew no scruple, laxity only and not law; here and there people like Slindon and Lord Alfred, flowers in the swamp, contrasts, contradictions in my strange world. Yet I suppose it was like any other world.

II

I had ignored a letter that came from Isabel a week before Christmas, in which she hoped that I wouldn't be silly and that she'd see me at Ciber Court. I didn't go, setting up as a pretext that my parents hadn't asked me. Could I have gone? Yes. I could have gone with my new frocks, with my new ways, and the poor dears would probably have thought that I bought those frocks out of the wages of a manicurist, for mamma still thought in pre-Boer War prices, while papa never got farther than "something brown." But I couldn't face it. I couldn't sit there, eating the plum pudding of innocence, and carrying a secret which, if revealed, would have caused me to be turned out or rescued. I'd have had to tell.

Now Isabel wrote again. She had called at Balcombe Street, where, it appeared, Mrs. Witham refused to give my address. "A maddening woman," wrote Isabel. "She said the same thing four times." Yes, that was Mrs. Witham, all right. But Mrs. Witham forwarded the letter. Isabel said she was very upset. Where was I? What was I doing? Why was I hiding? Didn't I realize I was being cruel to

my people? Couldn't we meet and talk it over? Say next Thursday at six, if I could get away from work so early. Better make it six thirty. But Isabel was dining out early that night, having to go to the theater. But, even so, it was her best day. The postscript compelled me to go. It said: "Don't be silly and hide, unless you're out of London. If you're here we're bound to meet in the street one of these days."

Isabel was right. It couldn't be dodged. Besides, I rather wanted to see Isabel again, to talk to some one I'd known. It would link me up again, and I'm a rotten sentimentalist. So I went. Isabel made me wait two minutes, and came down dressed for dinner. She looked perfectly lovely, in a flame-colored evening frock. The new kind, the right kind, cut very low at the back and very high in front. But the outcast was maliciously glad to see that her stockings didn't quite match. That was Isabel all over—always that little wrong, and what a difference it makes.

"Well, Ursula," she said, as she kissed me, "and how's the manicuring?"

"Oh," I said, awkwardly, "all right." I sat down to think, while Isabel disposed herself on the couch. I couldn't keep this up, so went on, "I'm not in a manicure shop now."

"Oh? What are you doing?" She nodded toward my patent-leather shoes. "You look very rich."

I feinted, "Are they all well at Ciber Court?"

"Well, hardly," said Isabel. "Mamma's not very well, really. She has what she'd like to call megrims, except that it isn't done. I'm afraid there's something wrong with her. Her heart's not very strong."

"And papa?"

"Oh, papa's all right. Hunts a lot, as usual. Of course, they're rather lonely since you left. Why didn't you come down for Christmas, you little beast?"

"I couldn't."

"How do you mean, couldn't? Don't they give you three or four days' holiday at the place where you're working? By the way, where *are* you working?"

I hesitated. It must come out. For a moment I planned complicated explanations, phrases that were dignified, decided to be guarded and tactful. Then I blurted, "I'm living with a man."

Isabel slowly sat up on the couch, staring at me. Then, in a meditative tone, she said, "Well! I'm damned!"

"Bel!" I said. I was really shocked. The words of Vera Westley when I told her I was straight! Isabel and Vera . . . are all women the same when they're surprised? She did not notice.

"Living with a man? Ursula?" she said. "Really . . . are you having me on?"

"No. Why should I?"

"But why have you done it? I thought you were a fool to work, but I didn't know you were as big a fool as that."

"Oh, it's all very well your talking, but you haven't got to stay at home and you haven't got to work. You don't know what it's like. It's all very well preaching to me, but . . ."

"Now, don't get shirty. You know I don't pretend to be a saint, but I do believe in keeping up a halo."

I laughed. She was perfectly serious.

"Living with a man!" she repeated. "But why doesn't he marry you? With looks like yours you ought to have brought it off."

"Brought it off!" I snarled, insulted by the suggestion that I'd failed to make a man marry me. "I wish you wouldn't talk without knowing. He can't marry me. He's married already."

"Let him get a divorce."

"His wife won't divorce him."

"He must make her. It's no good being sentimental. He can make her divorce him, all right, if he starves her out."

"She'd like starving; she's a Catholic."

"Oh, my dear Ursula," murmured Isabel, accepting this fact, "what a mess you've made! Tell me about him." After I'd done she said, "Yes, sounds all right. I'm sure

he's perfectly charming. He'd have to be charming to make you go off the rails." I thought of Philip, but said nothing. "What's it all leading you to? How long do you think this will go on? Men don't stick to women when they've lost their looks; then it's women do the sticking."

"Do you really think that?" I said. "Do you think that if Gervers could he'd leave you for somebody else when you lose your looks?"

She smiled. "Oh no! Gervers is a sentimentalist; he'd never leave me. Only, he'd get led astray, and in the end the result would be the same. I wish I could make you understand that men need chaining up."

I sighed. "I expect you're right, Bel, but I'll never learn your lesson. I'm 'soppy,' as they say in my new world."

"Your new world? I say," she added, in a frightened tone, "this man of yours, he's all right, isn't he?"

"How do you mean, all right?"

"Oh dear," she replied, impatiently, "don't get shirty. What is the use of it? You're in a horrible mess, compromised. When you want to get married, it 'll leak out . . . unless you leave him now. Better go abroad for a year and study painting in Florence, or something." She took my hand: "Do let me look after you, Ursula. I've got plenty of money."

She was very nice. I had to kiss her and thank her. I respected her cynicism. One must respect anything that is perfectly successful, yet maintains an exterior amiable and urbane. But I wouldn't be taken care of, and I wouldn't leave Julian. Isabel tried to move me in other ways. "It's awfully hard on mamma," she said. "What do you think's going to happen if she finds out?"

"She won't find out. Mamma doesn't. And nobody would dare to tell papa."

"Mamma isn't very well, you know that. And they're both of them lonely, now they're getting old."

"Have you thought of going to live with them, Bel?"

"I can't. I've got to look after Gervers."

"That's that. But if I were a boy, would you suggest

that I must give up my career and live at home because my parents are old or ill?"

"Your career!" said Isabel, bitterly. "Mrs. Warren's Profession!"

We had a quarrel then, but in the end I melted, and Isabel cried. I think she admired me a little for being an adventuress, and so she was a little nervous. I had done something so dashing, outdone the furtive affairs I suspected in her life. "Well," she summed up, "mind you come to me first when the smash comes."

Talk of speeding the parting guest!

Chapter VI

Awakening

I

I COULDN'T get rid of Sir Charles Baldwin. Now and then I wondered whether I wanted to. The awful words of Isabel stuck in my head. She so confidently expected a smash. Very likely my relation wouldn't last forever. I think that in that moment I ceased to love Julian, without his having done any wrong, merely by being able to conceive that he might no longer love me. When a woman says, "You don't love me," she means, "I don't love you." Love is little more than echo.

Sir Charles took me out to lunch once or twice in March; once we went to a matinée. I punctiliously told Julian every time; it didn't seem fair not to. He didn't mind. "After all, you must lunch somewhere. Only don't you go and fall in love with old Baldy."

"Don't you want me to?" I replied, archly.

"Not if you can help it."

He irritated me; he ought to have made a fuss. Also he took the edge off my companionship with Sir Charles. I didn't want to make Julian jealous; I wasn't so silly; but I wanted him to be jealous. Call me unreasonable if you like, but that's me. I think, however, that I could have made Julian jealous if I had described the way in which Sir Charles behaved. I saw no reason to report this. I told Julian I was going with him. That cleared my conscience. Why should I tell him more? If he chose to misunderstand Sir Charles, that wasn't my fault. Indeed, Sir Charles was rather embarrassing. He couldn't pass the toast rack without shaking hands. I wonder why I let him? I didn't like

him. Perhaps he was monumental; he was the profiteer triumphant, and the profiteer of that period had a Juggernaut touch that was impressive. I liked to hear him talk of the rivals he'd smashed, the government officials he'd corrupted. His super-Rolls-Royce crushed bodies every day, and they all bled gold.

I let him kiss me once. It seemed the only way to prevent him trying. He was massive and futile; he didn't matter to me. I lunched with him as I would have lunched with anybody who asked me, and was not too repulsive; when one has nothing to do one must lunch with somebody. So humiliating to sit in a restaurant alone, when most of the others are coupled. I made no plans. Mainly, I regarded him as a man who gave seats at the theater, flowers, crystallized fruits; a woman must have that sort of man. What are we to do? We most of us have many desires and little money. If we owned the money of the world, and the men didn't, then we could afford the male virtues of dignity, independence, generosity, and perhaps even truth. Virtues are the greatest luxuries, but so far as I can see a man has to get jolly rich before he thinks of acquiring them.

Still, the absurd Sir Charles was to influence my relation. One day in April he appointed to pick me up at the flat and take me to Hyde Park Corner for a walk in the Park. He wanted to see the tulips; at least, so he said. We walked from the Achilles statue across to Victoria Gate, after he had made a vain effort to take me up Church Parade and later through the Flower Walk. I wouldn't. One didn't know whom one might not meet in those respectable areas; but he didn't care, and, indeed, he forgot all about the tulips. He employed the hour before lunch in formulating a declaration of love, which showed that he chose his moment for business better than for his amours. He started well, but I began to want my lunch; if I could have been rude to this pirate K.B.E., it would have been then.

"I never felt to a girl like I do to you. There's something about the way you hold your head, you know, that one

doesn't come across every day. First time I saw you I said to myself: 'That's a high-stepper,' and, mind you, I know a bit about high-steppers. I've learned a bit since I came to town. You London girls, you're real girls, not like the Manchester drabs that don't deserve to be females." He went on for a long time. It seemed that I drove him distracted, that he dreamed of me. He grew sentimental. "Sometimes when I send you bouquets from the florist, I've wondered whether it wouldn't be better if I went out into the country (run down in an hour in the car, you know) and get you a bunch of buttercups and poppies. Simple flowers of the field, you know. Eh, what!"

I couldn't help laughing. The profiteer couldn't even spare the buttercups. My laughter must have encouraged him, for he added:

"Look here. Let's get down to brass tacks, as the Yankees say. I know your Johnnie, a nice boy and all that. Eh, what! Still, he can't marry you."

"But . . ."

"Oh, I know all about it. You don't keep things from Charlie B.'s intelligence department. Quin's got a wife stowed away. Didn't he tell you?"

"Of course he did."

"I didn't suppose he'd do the dirty on you. But you got to face facts in this world. He can't make your pile for you, and I can."

I did not reply. I vaguely wanted to know what he would propose.

"Mind you, I don't say I'm Rockefeller, but I've been scooping it a bit lately. I could do you some good. Want to go on the stage?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you only got to say it. I'll give you three months' training under any manager you like. Get you a theater; any damn theater you like. And put up fifty thousand quid to start you in management."

I did not reply.

"That's better than setting you up in a flat the other side

of the river, which is what I suppose you thought I was playing up to? What! Well, what about it?"

"Oh, I couldn't," I murmured. The offer was so sumptuous that for a moment love was silent.

"How do you mean, couldn't? Don't you get me? Start you on an allowance, say a couple of thousand a year, and give you a good time. When you're ready you'll have your own theater, and you leave the press to Charlie B. Eh, what?"

It was terribly tempting. What had Isabel said? How long would my looks last? My own theater! My picture in the *Tatler!* Frocks from the Maison Dromina . . . the only thing Julian couldn't give me. But Julian! No, I couldn't do it. And now this man was holding my arm above the elbow. I hated him, then, his blunt features, his wealth, the manners he had just purchased. Apart from Julian, I couldn't have said "yes." I can't sell myself. I'm no good at it. I refused. He took it marvelously well. "Well, we'll let it alone now. Eh, what? We'll have another talk by and by. Now let's go and have lunch."

We went to the Carlton. I was vaguely uncomfortable, though he did not touch me in the car. This way of accepting defeat and alluding to another struggle worried me. Perhaps that was how Sir Charles had got what he wanted. That was terrifying. Still, lunch was very nice; the band was banding hard; all the pretty people were lunching with the rich ones. Arf a Mo' and Meerbrook had a party, obviously capitalists, judging by their collars and ties. I recognized a popular actress; farther on a decrepit but distinguished peer. But just as I was raising to my lips a fragment of sole, I saw, half a dozen tables away, Christine Waldron. I smiled at her, and after a second she answered, but with a little flicker of discomfort in her expression. I dodged from right to left to look past the tables that intervened; I wanted to see who she was with. Then I dropped my fork. The head of her companion showed thick waves of molded golden hair. Julian!

I don't know how I got through that lunch, except that

Sir Charles helped me by relating at length how one made plush. He was the sort of man who entertains women with that sort of thing. In the middle, Christine must have told Julian that we were there, for he turned and waved his hand at me. Sir Charles turned and acknowledged the greeting. "We'd better join them for coffee," he remarked.

"All right," I said. My mind was in a whirl. I had told Julian that I was lunching with Sir Charles, but he hadn't told me he was lunching with Christine. He was hiding! I was unjust enough to think that . . . of a man who was "hiding" at the Carlton. An intolerable sense of grievance overwhelmed me. If he had time to lunch at the Carlton, why couldn't he take me? Didn't want to. Preferred to take Christine. Now I saw why he was a partisan of Sadie's and wanted to keep her with Pawlett. On the sly he was dangling after Christine himself. So here was the smash. That's how a smash began.

Sir Charles said: "Look here, before we join them, have you been thinking over what I said this morning? Because I'm still ready if you say 'yes.'" As I did not reply, he pressed his advantage: "Come on. Better say 'yes' while you can. Eh, what! Two thousand a year till you're ready, and then fifty thousand quid and your own theater. Don't miss your market."

"No," I said. I didn't want him; I didn't want Julian. I was sick of all these men. Still, when Sir Charles got up to go to their table, I followed him.

The same old talk began, the endless talk which until then had seemed to me new. I was dreadfully apart. They asked each other whether they had seen "Kissing Time," and did they think that little fair-haired puss in the "Kiss Call" could play for nuts. There I sat, frozen.

"Say what you like about it being high art," remarked Julian, "but you ought to go to 'The Young Visiters.'"

"What's Edyth Goodall like?" asked Sir Charles.

"Topping," said Christine.

This was the first time I had heard her praise a woman. Perhaps the cine player felt that Edyth Goodall was a true

actress, or at least one who dwelt in a loftier realm, who would never rival her thread of a voice. The subject was not pursued. No subjects were pursued in that world.

"Wonder whether 'Buzz Buzz' 'll ever come off," remarked Christine.

"Why should it?" replied Julian. "With 'Chu Chin Chow' sixteen hundred up? and 'The Maid of the Mountains' four years, not out."

"We'll give 'em something new by and by," said Sir Charles, looking sideways at me. "We'll mop up your Teddie Gerards and your Phyllis Dares."

"Yes," said Julian, meditatively, "we do want something new. We've got Lorna and Toots Pounds, of course, fresh from the halls, and a jolly little couple they are. Still, we do want something new." He glanced sideways at Christine; as I was especially acute that day, I connected that with the sideways glance of Sir Charles at me. We were rivals, then, Christine and I, stage rivals.

But I was not allowed to dwell on this idea, for, as I have said, in that world one didn't dwell on ideas.

"Have you seen Satterthwaite?" asked Sir Charles, looking at Julian.

"Oh . . . no," said Julian, hesitating. Then, more firmly, "How's old Mo'?"

Sir Charles paused before replying. "He *seems* all right."

"Yes," said Julian. "Of course one never knows."

We two women listened sharply. We didn't understand, and yet we felt that there was something to understand.

"He's a sporting sort of fellah. What?" said Sir Charles. "Of course a man can overdo it a bit. He wanted me to put money into his renting company, but I said: 'No.' Not for Charles B. He puts his money into his own business where he can get it out. Eh, what?"

"I quite agree with you, Sir Charles," said Julian.

"Still, I guess he'll raise it."

A few words were said about Reuben Satterthwaite, who, it seemed, still wanted to be a rabbi. Then Baldwin glanced

at Christine and said, slyly, "Well, Miss Waldron, how's Pawlett?"

"It's no business of mine how Mr. Pawlett is," said Christine, looking dignified because she felt awkward.

"Sorry," said Sir Charles. "Thought you knew him."

"Course I know him," said Christine. "Who doesn't? A man who lives at stage doors."

"Do you know," said Sir Charles Baldwin, thoughtfully, "it seems queer to me that a fellah like Pawlett should be hanging round Sadie. What? She's a good-looker in her way, yes. Still, if I was Pawlett I'd like something a bit fresher."

"She's a very nice woman," said Christine, "and I won't have you run her down."

"I'm not running her down," said Sir Charles, "but I bet you anything you like she'll show you her marriage lines sooner than her birth certificate." The other two laughed, and Julian said:

"Yes, she *is* getting a bit ancient, isn't she? Fortunately it doesn't matter on the films; brings out the features. You should see Sadie registering depression; she's made for it. You know, the corners of her mouth are going down; those folds near the chin help a lot. Well, well, we must all come to it, mustn't we? So must you, Christine, even if you do look like next year's peach. Got to make hay while the sun shines, don't you think?" He paused. "Of course, Sadie's brought it upon herself. Drinks too much. And she's got the devil of a temper. How Pawlett has stuck to her so long I don't know. Especially as she runs about with anybody. I asked her to count up her affairs once, and she said she hadn't enough fingers and toes to do it on. . . . Also she said it wouldn't be decent to count up those of the last four years. You see, she's been four years with Pawlett."

"Anybody can see what sort of woman she is," replied Christine, abandoning her championship.

"From the gutter to the gutter. Eh, what?" said Sir Charles. "That's the story of most women unless they stop at Park Lane on the way."

"If I was Pawlett," remarked Julian, "I'd chuck her . . . as soon as I got anybody better."

At last we got up to go. Julian returned to Dromina's, Christine went in a taxi, and Sir Charles offered to take me home. He tried to kiss me again on the way, and I would have let him, so disgusted was I with Julian, only I was sick of all men. I was a little sorry for him, though, because for a moment he seemed sincere.

"Seems to me, Little Bear," he remarked, rather bitterly, "that I'm strong enough to offend you and not strong enough to capture you. Eh, what?"

What could I do? One can't give oneself to all the men who want one. If they cared one would only make them all unhappy. But I did not think of him long, for I was horribly upset. Not only could I not understand how Julian came to be lunching with Christine without telling me, but his sudden disloyalty to Sadie was intolerable. Only two months ago, in the tea shop, he had sided with her, suggested means to hold Pawlett. Now, at the behest of a small majority, he was sneering at her, making her plight worse. I cried a good deal that afternoon, and I don't know whether I felt that I'd lost my man because he was running after Christine, or because he was showing himself less than I thought him. To lose one's dream of a man may be worse than losing the man himself.

II

I was too proud to let him see my misery. So I powdered hard, but I had not the energy to talk much at dinner. I think I even talked of the weather. Of the weather! To one's beloved! He stared at me now and then, but he was clever enough not to talk until the waiter brought coffee. Even then he pretended to settle in an armchair with a novel; we so remained, intolerably apart for some time. He hadn't kissed me since morning, and a day is so long without kisses. But he didn't move. There he lay, cool and beautiful, turning over the pages only at such intervals as showed that he was not pretending to read, but was actually doing so. He

blew rings of tobacco smoke, and though all my energy was banded to resist, I could not bear it; a sudden sob escaped me. At once he was by my side, on his knees, holding the hands which I struggled to wrest away.

"Darling," he murmured, "what's the matter? What is it? Don't cry." He tried to kiss me, but I held him off. "Darling, why?"

"Don't touch me," I said.

He must have hesitated between methods, for at first I felt his muscles taut, as if he purposed to caress me by force. Then he thought it wiser to relax, got up, stood away, let me wipe my eyes.

"Now," he said, "what's all this nonsense?"

"Nonsense!" I said, bitterly. "Is it nonsense when I find you lunching on the sly with another woman?"

"My dear girl . . ."

"Don't try to be smooth. Why don't you own up? One doesn't lunch with a girl as pretty as Christine without there being something in it. So don't tell me that there wasn't. I suppose you'll tell me you met her in the Haymarket, and she suggested you should lunch together. She overruled you, didn't she? You couldn't say no. It wouldn't have been polite, would it?"

He looked really sorrowful. "Don't talk like that, Little Bear; it's not like you."

"Is it like you to be unfaithful to the girl who's dependent on you?"

"Unfaithful!" he repeated, testily. "What rot you talk! I haven't been unfaithful to you."

"Perhaps not. But you will be soon."

"With Christine? Don't be a fool. If it was to be with Christine, it 'd have been long ago. Oh, women! women! what a damn nuisance you all are! Just because we're men and women we can't meet; we can't talk. One might think you'd caught me coming out of a private room at Cazzarino's."

I shrank. I don't know why that hurt me so. Yes, it struck at the beginning of the career I couldn't help being

ashamed of, I don't know why. At last I managed to speak.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why should I tell you? I could give you the reason if I liked, but why should I? Am I not free to lunch with another woman? Do I make a fuss because you lunch with Charlie B.?"

"I tell you."

"Always?"

"Julian! Do you doubt me?"

"Well . . . you're doubting me, all right."

This bewildering bit of logic was enough to knock out my arguments. When men reason they puzzle us as much as we puzzle them when we argue with them. So, more mildly, I said: "All right. Tell me why you were lunching with her."

"Business."

"How do you mean, business? If she wants a frock, surely she can go round to Dromina's. . . ."

"Now don't start off again. You surely don't think that I'm going to spend thirty bob on lunching Christine for the sake of a frock? Wouldn't pay. There's quite another game on. Little Bear, I'll tell you a bit of news—Pawlett's chucked Sadie."

Oh! Sadie was down. That's why Julian kicked her. But I was puzzled. "What's that got to do with your lunch?"

"Didn't you listen to what I said? That Pawlett ought to chuck Sadie as soon as he got anything better? Well, he's got it, and it's Christine." He took out his watch. "Yes. Now it's Christine."

I had a horrible suspicion. "But you don't mean that you arranged. . . . Oh, it's unbelievable! Julian . . . not for money?"

"Oh, don't be silly! You look at me as if I was a white-slaver. Course, it doesn't do to be too particular, but Christine had a sort of prejudice against Pawlett. Somebody had to talk her over."

"Why should you be that person?"

"Because I was the only person who could make Christine believe that her voice would last three acts."

"Why do it?" I said, quite bewildered.

"Because," said Julian, painstakingly, "if Christine is sure of her voice, she will want to show it off. If she wants to show it off, she won't be able to get away from the cinema and on to the stage unless somebody finances a musical comedy for her. Now do you see?"

"No." I was too unhappy to see. What a horrible mesh this was, with Julian in it as a sort of spider.

He flushed with anger. "Oh, you're dense! Look here. Christine wouldn't look at Pawlett, but, now that I've convinced her that she can sing, she'll look at Pawlett as a capitalist. Pawlett will finance Meerbrook's opera for her. And you may remember that, some time ago, Meerbrook and I exchanged a little bit of paper, according to which, if I get his thing on the boards, I am to do the forty frocks. That's at least a hundred and fifty guineas commission for us."

"Oh," I cried, "it's horrid!"

"Why horrid? Pawlett's keen on Christine. Well, he's happy. Christine wants to be a star; she gets her chance. Meerbrook wants his light opera staged. He gets it. And I get, not only a hundred and fifty guineas, but the hell of an advert. Everybody's happy."

"What about Sadie?" I asked.

"Oh, Sadie!" said Julian. "She'll be all right. She'll get somebody else."

"Will she? Weren't you saying that she was losing her looks?"

He turned on me swiftly. "Well, in that case she'd soon have lost Pawlett all the same. So what harm have I done her?"

He was right. I couldn't reproach him; he had merely scuttled a sinking ship. But he was not sure of me yet, and talked for a long time. He grew cynical. All things had to end; Sadie had had her chance; she'd played her cards badly. I thought, "Comedian!" It was no use my trying to ride the high horse over him; he wasn't going to be bad-

gered by any woman. "Tragedian." Or again, Sadie still had the work she loved, the film; he was very sorry for Sadie, though it couldn't be helped. Also he'd introduce her to everybody he knew, so as to give her a chance. "Ingenu!"

At last he took my hands again; his face very close to mine, he murmured: "You see how it is? You understand, don't you?"

I nodded.

"You don't believe there's anything between Christine and me, do you?"

Again I nodded.

"Well, then," he muttered, and the sentence expired as our lips met.

Oh, I did love him; I couldn't help it. I know it was physical, but when he held me like that I couldn't resist him. Perhaps his beauty enthralled me even when I found him base. Even to-day, when I remember the smoothness of those golden waves under my hands, when for a moment a ghostly memory takes on a material form, and lips forgotten, but still fresh, seek mine, moist and desirous, carrying upon their firm lines a faint aroma of Egyptian tobacco, I tell myself that I love him still, wayward demigod, accidental demon. Lots of women go to their grave without loving, but I know what it's like. It's like having a fishhook in one. It hurts, but you can't get it out.

III

It was only ten o'clock. "Let's go round to Moses and see his new pictures," said Julian. "They change the program to-night."

We went. I was glad to obey him. I think I loved him more because I respected him less. Contempt brings people closer to one. We went along Piccadilly. At the corner of Sackville Street I saw a woman watching the passers-by. It was Freda.

"Wait a moment," I said to Julian, "I want to talk to that girl."

We exchanged a few words. She was still good-looking,

still cool, still secure. She pursued the life she had made for herself, pursued it with dignity. Mr. Higham had thrown her over long ago. Her child was out at nurse in Essex. No, she wasn't unhappy. Life was like that. She was doing well. She hinted that she had a little money saved; she talked of a future return with a dowry to a patient Scandinavian lover.

"I don't like your having anything to do with that sort of woman," remarked Julian.

"We were in the manicure shop together, but she hasn't been lucky."

"Not so lucky as you, Little Bear," he said, pressing my arm.

"No," I replied, "not so lucky."

Chapter VII

Never Again

I

SOMETIMES I wish I had proper pride, and the right kind of feelings. Life would be easier. When I discovered that Julian had practically arranged an irregular alliance between Christine and Mr. Pawlett, I suppose I ought to have drawn myself up to my full height and said, "All is over between us, sir." Only life is a long way from the Lyceum. One's weak. One loves. Another way of putting it. Instead, well, I didn't accept what he'd done, but I decided to let it alone. Being a woman, I could tell myself that I wasn't qualified to criticize business methods. At least that's how I put it to myself in the end.

So we lived very happily for the next three or four months. I suspect that my condonation of his behavior had something to do with it; I was in an inferior position to him, and, though I believe in votes, female equality, all that, I can't help believing that men and women live most happily on a basis of slight feminine inferiority. Besides, Julian was charming. He was also more interesting, because now I was in a way his accomplice, and so he let me see something of his social maneuvers. Thus, I understood how he made so much money in an occupation which generally yields only a thousand or so a year. I grew used to his methods. One day Julian persuaded a woman to buy an entire set of evening frocks, by informing her that a friend of his, the assistant editor of *The Perfect Lady*, wanted to reproduce them . . . and why should she not be reproduced with the frocks? Another day he captured a young peeress and made her buy three models for a hundred guineas each, by whispering that

these were ordered by a celebrated actress. He drove her round to the London and Brighton goods station, collected the case, took it to her house, promising to tell the actress that the models were lost. Time would be wasted in making inquiries, while the peeress wore the models. Then she should return them. The linings would be changed. The actress would wear her cast-offs. If the trick was found out, the peeress would reply that she'd given them to her maid to sell.

"But what about your client the actress?" I asked.

"Oh, she! She's ceased to matter. She's taken a five-year contract in the States."

I hated it. But it seems one can rise only on other people's bodies, and I couldn't help enjoying it. His appeal, though always to the lowest vanity, to the basest desire to humiliate, to the vilest spirit of competition, was amusing and nimble. After all, could it be otherwise? His clients were fashionable women.

We went to Scotland for a month. He wanted to take me to Braemer, and chaffed me when I wouldn't go. "I see," he said. "Afraid of having to introduce me to the King?" He was right, I was rather afraid of meeting people in the Ballater district. In the end we went to Skye. Skye felt safe. It rained nearly all the time. When it did not, we climbed rocky peaks with unpronounceable names, *via* terrifying gullies, where one held on with elbows and knees. I liked it, though I was frightened. It was so birdlike up there. I got used to everything except the descents, especially down screes where stones rolled and gave way under one's feet. Julian mainly wore a suit of powder-blue tweed through which ran a yellow-and-purple pattern, which was quieter than it sounds; it set off his white and rose skin adorably. When he took off his cap and the wind blew his golden locks straight, he was indeed young Apollo. We had cream everywhere, and I began to grow a little stout, much to the satisfaction of Julian, who said that when he first came across me whenever he kissed me he feared I'd rattle. We were so far away from the world in Skye. We only got

the *Daily Mail* three times a week. Nobody talked of *revues*, of stunts; most of the people came from Glasgow or Edinburgh; the one family from London had never heard of Tootoo. One didn't do anything that mattered except get fat and brown. I should have liked to stay there forever, in a cottage by a wandering burn, printing above the door, "Forever wilt thou love and he be fair." It's lucky I didn't. I should have got bored. I know that sounds cynical, but, as I've said, I don't have the right kind of feelings.

II

We came back to London in the middle of September, feeling a little strange and rather excited. Oh, how lovely Euston Road looked! I didn't know how much I loved it until I came back. Just the bookstall, with so very many publications on it. Oh, to read something one understood. About things one knew! and no longer the *Scotsman* or the Glasgow *Herald*. But if she felt a little strange until lunch time, old London did not take long to burst upon me. We had not gone a hundred yards along Piccadilly when we noticed the placard of the evening paper, bearing the words:

GREAT
CINEMA
CRASH

"Poor old Moses!" said Julian.

"How do you mean?" I asked. "Do you mean Mr. Satterthwaite?"

Julian bought a paper and opened it. Indeed it was a sensational announcement. There was a panic in the cinema world. All the Satterthwaite houses were closed, and in some manner beyond my understanding a renting company and several producing companies were down too. I was silent for a moment. I was very sorry for the kindly old Jew. What would happen to Reuben and Esther? Would they rally to their father? The son give up religion? and

the daughter socialism? Perhaps Leopold in Chicago would help.

For several days the concussion in our world was terrific. Lunch and dinner parties were practically arranged to discuss Satterthwaite. What had happened? What would happen? How did it happen? How much in the pound could he pay? Oh, it was all right! The Union film people were buying him up. No, it wasn't true. Wouldn't touch the show with a pitchfork. The houses had reopened. No, they hadn't. They were being turned over to the Y. M. C. A. They were being converted into Turkish baths.

A pathetic figure in all this was Sadie, the leading lady of one of the film-producing companies. She was not economical and had saved nothing out of her salary. As she had lost Mr. Pawlett, she was practically penniless. She came to weep at Dover Street.

"I don't know what I shall do. Can't get a shop anywhere. You see, there's a couple of hundred thrown out by this smash, and they're just fighting at the agents."

"But couldn't you get something less than a leading part?" I asked.

"Catch me trying! I'd never have a chance again. They want to get you down, all of them. An agent this morning said the best he could do for me was a crowd part. A crowd part! For me! A guinea a day . . . when they want you. Got to wait at the studio on the chance, like a man at the docks."

"But while you're looking for something else?" suggested my prudence.

"I'd rather walk Regent Street."

Poor Sadie! She didn't look as if she'd have much success in Regent Street. In her misery she seemed quite forty.

Ten days elapsed. I grew conscious of certain activities in Julian. He was proceeding along the lines that governed business in our world. He left me in the evening to see Lord Alfred Lydbrook. A chance remark showed that he had some dealings with Meerbrook and Harry Lockwood. He

would give me no details, for he liked to spring things upon me with a charming air of boyishness. Suddenly I discovered him as the god in the machine, for two things happened together. Sadie was given a small part in a new *revue* that Harry Lockwood was staging. It was just enough to keep her alive, but she wouldn't lose caste in the cinema world. Simultaneously the papers stated that the various compromised film companies were being reconstructed and that a scheme was being laid before the creditors.

"Well," said Julian, leaning back in his armchair, "poor old Moses is going to have another ark. I believe it was Noah had the ark, but never mind."

I was told by degrees that Julian had influenced Lord Alfred to put some capital into the business. The capital was being written down (whatever that may mean). The pound shares would be written down to half a crown. There would be an issue of deferred shares, etc. . . . Oh, the things men talk about! Even my Julian, artist though he was, had an understanding of money that is no woman's. But one thing I understood: Satterthwaite was safe and was restarting on new lines. He was giving up expensive open-air productions and going in for society drama, which would not cost much to stage. I was very happy then, for Sadie and Satterthwaite were beautifully grateful. Sadie was almost too grateful; she invaded our flat whenever she was not rehearsing, talking endlessly of the kindness and sweetness of Julian, saying she wished she had a pal like him, vowing that if something of his sort came along she wouldn't think twice about leaving her little wooden hut if he just gave her a come-on. I got rather tired of this excited, rather raddled woman, talking the ready-made language of society catches. Still, one must suffer when one does good, like the Chinese, who must feed for life those whom they rescue from drowning.

Satterthwaite was equally grateful, and celebrated the reconstruction by a colossal dinner party, where I drank so much champagne that, with very little persuasion, I got on the table and sang "Where My Caravan Has Rested." At

the end I broke down and wept. At least I think so. I have a confused memory of Tootoo brutally remarking, "Pour a bucket of water over her," to a persistent refrain from Sir Charles Baldwin, whose ideas on feminine clothing were rather 1880, and who loudly proclaimed that he was going to unlace my stays. But there was something real about Satterthwaite. He came to see me one morning.

"I've come to see you, Mrs. Quin, instead of your husband, because he says I'm not to thank him. Well, I want you to know what it all means to me; I was going to shoot myself when he came in and helped me. We Jews—I'm a Jew, Mrs. Quin, though perhaps you wouldn't think it, my name being Satterthwaite, and nobody'd think it from my looks—well, we Jews, we don't forget what people have done for us. So I want you to know that if there's anything in the world I can do for either of you, I'll do it."

I got rid of him, because his thanks made me awkward. I liked him very much; his simplicity of mind was disarming, but, in a vague way, I felt guilty, owing to impressions that occupied my mind. I spoke to Julian about that.

"Julian, I didn't think of it at the moment, but do you remember the day we got back from Scotland and saw the placard saying that Mr. Satterthwaite was down?"

"Yes, what about it?"

"Don't you remember you said, 'Poor old Moses'? How did you know it was Mr. Satterthwaite?"

A little blush rose in his cheeks. "How do you mean, how did I know?" He bluffed, "Of course I knew."

"How?"

"I guessed."

"Oh? You knew he was rocky, then? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, hang it all! I can't tell you everything." His irritation passed away. "Now don't be silly. One would think that it was my fault he came down. Haven't I been doing everything I can for the poor old blighter?"

"Yes, I know; it's awfully sweet of you."

"Of course," said Julian, tolerantly, "one can't help

knowing things, and if they're useful to you, why not use them?"

I said nothing more; I didn't quite follow. I even accepted a check for fifty pounds to spend on "ribbons." Ribbons! Men are so irritating. In mamma's time they used to give them money for shawls; now it's ribbons. They have no feelings for clothes. . . . Even dress designers are masculine.

III

Some people have no respect for property in books. They wouldn't take one of your stamps, but they'll "borrow" a first edition inscribed to you by the author, and forget to return it. In my new world they were obviously not particular. One afternoon I discovered that Sadie had gone even farther; she'd borrowed my library book. That makes one rage, because it practically cuts one off from all books, since, of course, one never buys any. I wanted a book badly, had nothing to do. So, after lunch, I was energetic enough to go round to Sadie's flat in Bloomsbury. Then, to complete my irritation, the maid who opened the door informed me that Sadie was not at home. I hesitated for a moment.

"When will she be back?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I don't know, ma'am."

This was annoying. "I think she's got a book of mine that she was looking at last night. I want it back."

"I'm very sorry, ma'am."

I hesitated. "I wonder whether you could find it for me. It's got the library label on it."

"Well, ma'am!" The girl's face suddenly struck me as peculiar. "I don't think I could look through Miss Grafton's things, ma'am."

"Oh, nonsense! Look here, come with me and we'll have a look."

"I'm afraid I can't, ma'am," said the girl, firmly.

I stood there for a moment, staring at her. Then I smiled, and the maid responded. Upon the table lay a silk hat, gloves, and a smart cane.

"Oh!" I said. "Well, I expect I'll see Miss Grafton later." But as I turned to go I reflected that I did want my book very badly; I couldn't be bothered with Sadie's affairs; so I took an old envelope from my little bag and wrote on it a message, begging her to return the book that night. The hall was very small, the table very close. I laid the envelope on it. As I did so, I saw in the crown of the silk hat the initials J. Q. Julian! Whatever was he doing here? And at this time! A quarter past three. Business again, these mysterious maneuvers. I was annoyed. Why should I be shut out from his business? I'd go in and see them.

"It's all right," I said. "I didn't know Mr. Quin was here. I'm Mrs. Quin," and made as if to pass her.

The maid actually interposed her body between me and the door of the drawing-room. "I'm very sorry, ma'am, but I don't think . . . I'm afraid Miss Grafton is talking business with the gentleman."

"I know, I know. But I'm Mrs. Quin. Can't you see?"

"I'm very sorry, ma'am. My orders are Miss Grafton's not to be disturbed."

I don't know why, but as she said that suspicion rose in me like a Verey light. My heart began to pump; a little electric bell rang in each ear. I couldn't see properly. I suppose I was blind with rage. I expect that in another second I should have seized the maid by the throat. I'm like that, I'm afraid. But just as we were confronting each other, strained like steel wires, a door opened on the corridor and Sadie came out, staring in her surprise. For a moment I went numb all over, for her hair was down. We stood quite still for a second, we three. It was like a scene on the stage. I saw fear in Sadie's blue eyes. After a moment she must have been so frightened that she had to speak.

"Hullo!" she said. "I didn't know you were here." I did not reply. She gave me a false smile. "Go away, darling. You're dee tropp. Can't you see?" She winked. Still, I did not move. It must have been awful for her, my stillness and my silence. She couldn't bear it. She came

toward me, whispering: "Go on, darling. Mustn't spoil sport. See you later." She turned to go. "Ta-ta."

Energy returned to me. I called to her, "Sadie!"

She turned. "What is it? Don't make such a devil of a row."

"Why not? I'm not afraid of Julian hearing me."

Then she went pale, but she was game, and blustered: "Julian! What the devil do you mean? What's Julian got to do with it?"

I was looking at her steadily. "Julian's in there, isn't he?"

"My dear child, you must be dippy."

"Dippy, indeed! You're not alone, are you, Sadie?"

"No, of course not, but . . ."

"What's the name of your guest?"

"Really, you know, this is a bit thick."

"What's his name? If you don't tell me, I'm going to stay and meet him."

Obviously she was in a panic. "Look here, old dear," she said, "you really mustn't do that." I seized a chair and sat on it. "Oh, damn it all! I can't give the fellow away." We faced each other silently for some time, the maid looking on with marvelous coolness. At last Sadie burst out: "Well, I suppose I've got to be rotten, just because you're potty. It's Lockwood."

"Oh," I said, gently, picking up the silk hat. "How did Mr. Lockwood come to exchange hats with Julian?"

She did not understand at once. Then, perceiving the initials, her self-control deserted her. She had only enough presence of mind to remark, "Get out!" to the maid. Then she flung herself on her knees before me, trying to seize the hands which I withdrew, begging me to believe that it was an accident, that they'd had lunch together, that he'd come in for a drink. She was crying; her tears furrowed the powder on her face. I looked at her icily, while she protested; at first I had been judicial, like a lawyer; I cross-examined her; now I was merely incredulous and disgusted. Could Julian be unfaithful to me with a creature like that?

I suppose women are always amazed when their men turn to other women. Their vanity crashes. She went on protesting. She swore it had never happened before. Besides, I was quite wrong. She was ill. She was all in a fever. Oh, if only I'd go away and believe her, she'd never see Julian again; she'd take a job in the States. Only I was to say something. For God's sake I was to say something. How contemptible she seemed! Not because she'd taken my man, but because she crawled. If she'd faced me I could have hated her.

Suddenly I loathed her. I got up. I wasn't going to stay in this place any more, in this vile, immoral place (Pharisee!) while this worm writhed at my feet. I planned my departure, very cold and dignified. Of course, I would never see Julian again. Then I heard his voice: "Sadie, what are you palavering about? I say . . ." He drew nearer, stopped short, staring at me.

And once more the theatrical scene set itself with different characters, Julian and I standing in silence, and the woman taken in adultery weeping on the floor. But I couldn't be cold and dignified. Ursula Trent of Ciber Court, at the sight of her lover, lost all the instinct of an English gentlewoman. I took a step forward, trying to speak, and discovering that the stage rightly shows us people who speak between their clenched teeth. I couldn't get them apart.

"Beast! Cad! So that's what you were doing! I hate you."

"Look here, Little Bear . . ."

"Don't speak to me. What do you want to speak to me for? You've got no use for me." He made an uncertain gesture. "Don't touch me. What have you got to do with me? Isn't she good enough for you?"

"Oh, Little Bear," moaned Sadie, getting up, "don't say things like that!"

I took not the slightest notice of her. I was still looking at Julian. "You lied to me all this year, I suppose. How many mistresses have you had? You cur! You little curled puppy? With your pretty ways and your lying tongue. I sup-

pose everybody knows about this and I'm everybody's joke. I suppose everybody's talking of your keep. The poor little thing, so innocent, I suppose. Can't say boo to a goose, can she? It needs an accident for her to find out your affair with this creature."

Sadie suddenly grew angry. "Who the devil do you think you are?" she asked. "What about you? Where are your marriage lines? I've kept myself since I was fourteen, but I haven't been on the streets, but nobody knows where you were picked up."

I don't know why, but still I didn't notice her. I could see only Julian. I wanted to say lacerating things to him, things he wouldn't forget. I wanted to hurt him. It's easy enough, with one's dignity gone.

"How many more have you got?" I asked. "This creature here, I suppose you deceive her like me, don't you? You're a kind person, Julian, aren't you? With a taste for elderly duchesses. I suppose they reciprocate your feelings, and it brings you orders."

"Here!" said Sadie, suddenly energetic. "I'm not going to be bullied about. Get out." I did not move. She seized me by the arm. "Hop it!" At the contact of that hand Ursula Trent automatically turned and struck Sadie in the mouth. She gave a scream. Oh, the satisfaction of that scream! of the flesh giving under my hand. I went mad for a moment. Before Julian could intervene I struck her again and again; seizing her by her unbound hair, I dragged her to the floor. A strange savagery was upon me. I deliberately wanted to mark her, to disfigure her. It happened so quickly that I did not resist as Julian dragged me away. I just saw that he was greeny pale, as if afraid of me. He need not have been. At his dear contact (I perceived his scent, honey and flowers hair wash, and Egyptian tobacco) I went weak. The near sweetness of him took the rage out of me. I hated him, yes, but just then I felt mainly misery. I let him push me into the drawing-room. All was over. I'd better go. I couldn't bear to see him again. I'd go home and pack. Then he

opened the door. He still looked frightened; he didn't dare to scold me. He tried to be airy.

"Look here, Little Bear," he said, "it's all a mistake. Just stay here for a moment while . . . Well, I'll be back in a moment, and I'll take you home. I'll explain. You'll stay here, won't you?"

He must have taken my silence for consent, for he left me, but as soon as he had gone I crept to the door, went out. He came out of the room just as I closed the front door, but he did not dare to pursue the weeping figure that ran down the stairs.

Chapter VIII

"But Still!"

I

I HAD no plans. Just to get away, not to see them any more. As I walked down Shaftesbury Avenue, very fast, I was conscious of worry rather than of misery. Then my ideas grew more precise. I would go to the flat, pack, go away somewhere, get something to do. I didn't think of what to do, of how much money I had, how I should find work, and where to live. I was running away from my misfortune; I had not the coolness, nor did I encourage the hopes which made up my baggage when I paused on Waterloo Bridge two years before. At Piccadilly Circus I paused, struck by an idea. Pack! What a fool I'd been! Why hadn't I taken a taxi? Julian wouldn't let me go like that. I don't know why I thought that, for obviously he couldn't want me much. But he'd think he ought to win me back; men are slaves to the proper thing, and always do it most intensely when they don't want to. I couldn't face him; I couldn't stay in that flat and pack while he explained and explained and lied. No, I'd never go back. I'd been poor before; I could be poor again. I might buy a toothbrush at the chemist's. But don't be too censorious when I confess that I remembered the skunk tippet and muff which, prudently foreseeing the winter, I had the day before bought with Julian's fifty pounds. Furs! Men don't know how adorable are furs, nor lace. They don't understand that a woman would go to the devil for enough real lace. Well, the furs must go, but I won't pretend that they went cheerfully. I must buy a toothbrush. I went into the chemist's near the Monico, and bought a toothbrush.

"Very hard bristles," I said. Somehow hard bristles symbolized the future.

I stood for a moment by the fountain, holding my property, and only then did I grow afraid. It was a soft September day; everybody was about, opulent in large cars and jolly on the tops of omnibuses. The girls still wore their summer frocks; the men looked adventurous. I felt alone among them. Losing Julian, I supposed I lost everybody. Acquaintances were perishable things; Christine, Slindon, Arf a Mo', if I went on knowing them I couldn't keep clear of Julian. Besides . . . they didn't lunch at A B C's, as I was going to do. Terror seized me. That was all very well, but how much money had I? In my purse I found half a crown, three halfpence, and my latchkey. I shivered. What a symbol! Half a crown or the latchkey? Which? Every woman's problem, I suppose. How long could I live on half a crown? I had seven pounds in bank notes locked up in my trunk. No, never! With a theatrical gesture I flung the latchkey down a drain. Then I felt better.

Still, I had only two and sevenpence halfpenny. If only I could get a job now, perhaps they'd give me something in advance. Then for a moment I forgot my troubles as I watched the maneuvers of a woman who, followed by a man, was slowly crossing the Circus. She turned her head a little, to see whether he was following, then walked a little slower, so as not to leave him behind. Then she pretended to wait for a bus, while the man stood three yards off, hesitating. She turned her back; he came closer. She turned toward him; he moved away. She dropped her little bag; he picked it up. I crossed to Swan & Edgar's. Somehow it felt indiscreet to listen. Yes, this was the way. I'd be a slave again, yes, but there'd be no more lying about love. Then an old man, seeing me standing about, came up to me and took off his hat. Before he could speak I had run across Piccadilly. I'm no good; I've no courage; I'm only a damned lady. It is significant of my damned ladyhood that an impulse made me jump into a taxi and tell the man to drive me to the Mausoleum Club. I would ask Lord Alfred Lydbrook to suggest something. Oh, I'm a mere woman. I take a taxi when I've only got half a crown; injured by a man, I fly to another man.

Lord Alfred was not at the Mausoleum, but I seemed so distressed that the porter broke a rule, and informed me that Lord Alfred's other club was the Gadarene. I walked to the Gadarene, in St. James's Street. I'd given the taximan my half crown, and had only three halfpence. After I had waited a few minutes in a little cold room, Lord Alfred came down. I nearly kissed him, he looked so kind. An air of concern overspread his large, pink features; his yellow mustache drooped more than usual. He was about forty-five, and looked like a blushing seal.

"Well, Little Bear," he said, "I'll do anything in the world for you."

"How do you know I want anything?" I said, loving him for having guessed.

"You wouldn't wake up an old bachelor from his slumbers at his club just for fun, would you? Sit down."

He listened patiently to my story, now and then nodding. But he said nothing. After a time that annoyed me.

"What do you think?" I said.

"Oh, well," said Lord Alfred, "you were very fond of him, weren't you?"

"Of course, but after what he's done . . ."

"Yes, I know, I know. Still, it's the first time, isn't it?"

"So far as I know."

"So far as matters, then."

"Oh, don't be cynical, Lord Alfred. I can't bear it to-day."

"I'm not being cynical, my dear," he said, taking my hand in his, that looked like a bunch of pink sausages, "only you must understand that men take these things lightly."

"Lightly!" I said, in a tragic tone.

"Yes, of course. I don't mean it isn't wrong of him, but we're all a bit like that, Little Bear. You see, you women are so charming and we're so weak. He'll have forgotten Sadie in a month."

"Do you think I'll forget him in a month?"

"Of course you won't, and that's just it. Women make a fuss about things we think trifles."

"I was a trifle to Julian, then?"

"No, no, no. Sometimes men really fall in love, but they make love to women just because, well, it's polite. It's a habit. My dear child, you're very fond of Quin. Don't throw your happiness away because your pride's offended. Give him another chance and try to make yourself more attractive than the others."

I was stung. "Do you really mean to say . . . Really, this is too bad."

"Isn't there some truth in that?"

"Oh, well, even if there were, I sha'n't go back."

"'Fraid you won't," said Lord Alfred. "Since you're beginning to feel a little in the wrong, you're going to get obstinate, aren't you?" He smiled. He was such a man of the world. But he didn't understand the depth of my offense. So I said:

"No, it's no good. I know you're trying to do the best for me, but I can't go back."

He accepted that at once. He was a man of the world enough to take into account even a woman's folly. "Well, that's that," he remarked. "You say you want a job of some sort. You'd better walk on. You'll make a sensation, and after a few weeks I'll see if I can get you a few lines to speak. Only, I can't think of anybody who'll take you on just now. Lockwood's full up, I know, and Pershore is running a Shakespearian season. 'Fraid we'll have to wait a bit."

"But I can't. I've only got three halfpence."

"That's all right. We'll scratch up some money."

"Oh, I can't do that." Ursula Trent of Ciber Court couldn't borrow money from a man.

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Pick up a living, I suppose."

"Silly thing to do, don't you think? To hang about in the wet for a couple of pounds, when I'll let you have a hundred for nothing."

His beautiful indifference to the moral question moved me. "All right," I said. "I'll take it." He wrote out and handed me a check for this vast sum. As I shook hands,

I said, "I believe you're the only man I know who'd do this for me without . . . well, I mean just like that."

He patted my hand. "Don't talk rot," he remarked. "Go and buy yourself some toothpowder since you've got the toothbrush. You girls never think of anything. And let me know your address as soon as you've got one."

II

Suddenly it struck me that to avoid the flat was an act of cowardice. I ought to go back and pack. I do not pretend that before coming to this heroic resolution I had not worked out that I must spend at least twenty pounds out of Lord Alfred's check just on linen and spare boots. Also, winter was coming and I'd have to buy furs, or at least some sort of cloak. If only I hadn't bought those furs! Oh, I won't pretend any more. I wanted my things badly, and so told myself that I ought to face it out. It's years ago, so I'll own up. Besides, Julian might not be at home. If he wasn't it would be easier, and I should have been heroic all the same, since I was prepared to affront him.

Julian was at home. Evidently he had been waiting for me, for he was pacing up and down, and in the grate lay the stumps of half a dozen cigarettes. I took no notice of him and walked into my bedroom. Somehow I felt less miserable and less angry with him, probably because I now had a good deal to do. He did not follow me, so for some minutes I piled my clothes on the bed. I almost forgot him; he no longer existed. Then the door opened and I heard his voice, "Have some tea?" I did not reply. "It hasn't been standing. I told Beatrice to be ready to bring it up as soon as you came in."

I turned on him, flaming. "What made you think I'd come back?"

He tried to smile, but he looked like a beaten dog. He was very nervous, and trying to be jaunty.

"Oh, come on, Little Bear," he said, "don't get shirty."

"Shirty!" I gasped. I couldn't help it. I let loose at him

a long catalogue of wrongs. I ended up: "I've found you out and it's no use your saying anything. I'm going, and you'll never see me again. I never want to see your face again. Never."

He took a step toward me, holding out his hands. "Little Bear," he murmured, "don't go. Oh, I know I've been rotten to you. Don't go." He tried to take my hand.

"Go 'way," I said, backing. "Don't touch me."

Then a horrible thing happened. He flung himself upon his knees before me, snatched my hand, kissed it, murmuring, in a voice that grew more and more broken, denials of his conduct, confused explanations, promises of faithfulness. I couldn't reply, for I felt moisture on my hand. He was crying. It was terrible. I'd never seen a man cry.

At last I repeated: "Let me go. Go away, go away!" But I was helpless. He must have known it, for suddenly he raised his face to me, and, indeed, his eyes were swimming, his cheeks were wet.

"Don't leave me," he said. "I was mad. I can't do without you. I'll go to the devil if you leave me."

"Why did you do it?" I asked, feebly.

"I couldn't help it. I was sorry for Sadie."

"Sorry?"

"Well, you see, she was the one who got let down in that business between Christine and Pawlett. Meerbrook couldn't do anything for her. Oh, if only you'd see, I was sorry for her; one gets entangled."

I stared at him. Indeed, I believe he was telling the truth. It was just because he was kind and weak that he'd done this. Sadie wanted him, I suppose. He didn't want to hurt her. He didn't want to hurt me, either.

"I'll never see her again."

"No," I replied, after a moment. "I've got no ill feeling against you, Julian, but I've got to go."

He flung both arms round my knees, burying his face against me, and again choked with tears. For a moment I bore it; then—I half despise myself as I think of it—I couldn't bear to have him cry, this weak thing, this dependent, this

lovely, pitiful creature. I half understood him. Lord Alfred was right; women can't share themselves, and even when they are unfaithful they establish a sort of symbolic difference between two men. But men are different; men are casual.

He was still crying. I couldn't help it. I had to put my arms round my little boy and comfort him. Yes, he'd done wrong, like a child that does damage. "Don't cry," I murmured, my cheek against his. "Let's try to forget." As I spoke I despised myself for being overcome. Weakness, not strength, can have power over women; the weakness of men calls to us. "The tyranny of tears" exerts itself.

He looked up at me, smiling through his tears. Then, with his wet eyes, he was beautiful as a Greuze picture. He kissed me. He wiped his eyes. He got up. His smile grew more assured. It was over. He was forgiven, and he was forgetting already. Indeed, it was almost too easy. As he poured out the tea, he said:

"Pretty strong, isn't it?"

Indeed we women are abject. In love relations the vanity of men seems always to increase, while we grow more humble. Perhaps it is because we're less sure of ourselves. There are so many of us. We are indeed the superfluous sex.

We talked amiably over tea. I was very shaken, and from time to time threw a side glance at the man who had wept. Could he be the same as this one who laughed? But I wouldn't show it. I'd forgiven him and I mustn't stop halfway. I must espouse his mood, so I laughed more than he did, and even extracted from my memory a funny story he'd not heard before. He was very gay. I think he was rather proud of himself because he had been unfaithful to me and reconquered me all the same. He was surer of me than before. We talked of some frocks he was planning; of Ninette, who was very wretched, though she wouldn't confess it, because Roderick Bentham had suddenly reformed and ceased to beat her. She'd lost her grievance. We made a lot of conversation about Christine, who went about everywhere saying that Pawlett bored her, and that she was

going back to Miltiades. We talked of everybody but Sadie.

After tea, Julian, as if to celebrate the reconciliation, telephoned a theater for two stalls and ordered a table at the Carlton. I reproved him for his extravagance.

"Oh," he said, "that's all right. We've been doing rather well lately."

"How's that? Surely you haven't booked many orders yet? Why, only half the models are in!"

"I know. Of course, one can't do much business in September, but I don't mean that. We've made a bit."

I remained silent. I saw that he wanted to tell me something, and was hiding it, as a cat pauses over its mouse to enhance its relish. At last he couldn't contain himself. My little boy had to boast.

"I've had a little flutter," he said, "on the Stock Exchange."

"You mean you've speculated?"

"Yes. And it's come off." He looked at me triumphantly, stroking my arm. Why do men always caress us when they've been successful? A condescending kindness, I suppose; they want to make us happy in the only way they think a woman can be made happy, by petting. I wasn't quite in the mood to be caressed by the man I had forgiven, so I drew away.

He understood my repulsion at once and grew serious. "Yes, we've done pretty well. Made just over fourteen hundred pounds."

"Oh!" I said. I was impressed. I didn't mind gambling. Men smoke, swear, and gamble. Besides, it was a lot of money.

"Yes, I did a little business in cinema shares. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. If old Moses hadn't smashed when he did, I might have been let down."

"I don't understand. What had your business to do with Mr. Satterthwaite?"

"Don't you see? I beared his stock."

"Beared? You mean . . . oh yes, I remember you told

me something about that once. Bearing means selling shares, doesn't it? But I didn't know you'd got any cinema shares."

"Of course I hadn't, you silly kid. I'd have had to have money to buy 'em with. I sold short of stock." I looked blank, so he explained. "Look here; it's like this. You can buy shares without money. You don't have to pay for them till the account, a fortnight off. Then, if you can't pay, you sell the shares, make the difference if they've gone up, or pay the difference if they've gone down. The same day you buy another lot of shares for the next account. They charge you interest for lending you the money. Do you see? Well, if you want to sell shares you haven't got, it's the same thing. When the time comes to deliver the shares you've sold, somebody lends you the shares for a fortnight. That's how I managed to sell the cinema shares I hadn't got. I started selling in July; they went down a bit, and I made a bit every fortnight, but of course I didn't scoop it until old Moses went smash. Then the shares came down with a run. I'd sold my shares on an average at eighteen shillings; I bought 'em back at four and threepence. As I'd dealt in two thousand shares, I made about fourteen hundred pounds."

"But," I cried out, "what would have happened if they'd gone up instead of down?"

"I'd have lost my money."

"Wasn't it rather rash?"

He smiled. "It would have been rather rash if I hadn't been pretty sure Moses was coming down."

"How did you know?"

"Oh, one never exactly knows."

"Then it was a gamble?"

"Not exactly." He hesitated, opened his mouth, shut it again, but he had to talk. "Look here; I don't mind telling you, but don't let it go any farther. In July I found out that old Moses was rather rocky. He'd given a mortgage to a fellow called Badsworth. We got rather friendly over a couple of cocktails, Badsworth and I. He was getting rather

sick of picture-house investments. Said he thought the boom was spent and he was going to put his money in oil. That meant that he'd call in the mortgage. If he did, well, Satterthwaite isn't quite out of the wood yet; he could pay the interest, but I didn't think he could meet the mortgage. So I had a word with him."

"Well?"

"Well, I thought that as a friend I ought to tell Satterthwaite that Badsworth might call in his mortgage. To give him a chance to meet it, as you see."

"That was very nice of you," I said, beaming.

"Oh, I don't mean I wanted to break my neck over Moses. I was afraid it might give him nerves. And it did. He was fool enough to write to Badsworth about it. That, of course, put the wind up Badsworth, who gave three months' notice that he'd call in the mortgage."

"What a pity you told Mr. Satterthwaite!" I said.

"It couldn't be helped. I knew he'd come down then. Well, as he was coming down it didn't seem fair that other people to whom he owed money should be let down. You know that Moses rents films from other people, apart from his own producing company. So I thought that the other renters ought to know that Badsworth was calling in his money. To give them a chance, you see. Of course, they pressed Moses to settle, end August. Satterthwaite was frantic. He asked me to call on Badsworth, but when I went to see Badsworth, wanting to help Moses all I could, I didn't think it fair to Badsworth that he shouldn't know that the renters were on Moses like a pack of hounds. You see, Badsworth might have been let down."

"Poor Mr. Satterthwaite," I said. "They were on him all together, then?"

"Yes. Well, as he had to go down, and it wasn't known yet, except by me, I thought I might as well sell a few shares in his exhibiting company. If he smashed, I scooped it. And he did."

He looked at me triumphantly, feeling very clever and technical, I suppose, as men do when they talk to women of

things they don't understand. Then I began to work out the affair in my own language, while Julian smiled at me. "But then, Julian, if you hadn't told Mr. Satterthwaite that Mr. Badsworth was going to call his money in, Mr. Badsworth perhaps wouldn't have pressed the mortgage."

"Perhaps not. Still, that's how it happened."

"Yes, I see. But why did you tell the renters that Mr. Badsworth was going to call his money in?"

"It was only fair."

"But if you hadn't told them they wouldn't have pressed."

"No, of course. But it couldn't be helped."

I thought for a minute. Then horror came over me. "Julian! You didn't want those shares to go down, did you?"

"Well, of course I made a bit if they did."

"But then . . . Oh, Julian, it's incredible! Oh, I see it! You frightened Mr. Satterthwaite until he frightened Mr. Badsworth. And then you turned the renters upon Mr. Satterthwaite by telling them that Mr. Badsworth was taking his money out. It's you who smashed Mr. Satterthwaite."

"Oh," said Julian, "I shouldn't put it like that."

"What would have happened if you'd done nothing?"

"I don't know. Oh, damn it all! One might think I was unfriendly to poor old Moses. Haven't I done all I could? Didn't I get Lydbrook to put him on his legs again?"

"After smashing him and making your profit."

"Oh, you women! You get these fancy ideas into your head. You know nothing about business."

"Perhaps not. Business sounds like murder. Julian, just answer me this, What would have happened if you'd let this alone?"

"I don't know."

"Would you have sold those shares?"

"Oh, damn! . . ."

"Would you have made fourteen hundred pounds if Mr. Satterthwaite hadn't smashed?" He was silent. "Answer me, Julian. We've had enough trouble to-day."

"No, I suppose I wouldn't."

"Then it paid you to smash him?" He did not reply, and

I got up. "You smashed him on purpose to make fourteen hundred pounds." He stepped toward me. "Don't touch me. I can hardly believe it."

"Look here," he blustered; "don't be a fool. I've got to make money to keep you."

"Not that way," I replied, weakly. We're bound to be weak before our keepers.

"Well, what do you suggest? A villa in Brixton? How do you think I pay for your frocks? Not out of my wretched salary and commission." In a sentimental voice he added: "Do you think I like doing these things? I have to do them . . . for you."

I backed two or three steps. "How dare you say things like that to me! Did I make a bargain with you when you took me away? I didn't want money. I wanted only you."

"You're very expensive."

I gasped at this caddishness. I was injured rather than angry, yet half guilty. Perhaps I was extravagant. I almost relented, and understood how women go on loving forgers and thieves. But he lost his advantage by a chance remark.

"Anyhow, I put Moses on his legs again. Poor old Moses! He does what he can. He's got me an order to dress his new society drama."

Then I lost my head. I screamed at him. He was a ghoul, a vampire. Not only had he wrecked the kind old man for a paltry sum, but he'd helped him up for the sake of another advantage, for the sake of the money of the man he'd smashed. And he'd not only taken that; he'd taken Satterthwaite's gratitude. He protested, but I couldn't stop. He was incredibly vile to me, and I wanted to tell him so. Mean, ratlike. He let me talk to the end, when I was exhausted and nearly crying. Then I saw a light in his eyes; he came toward me round the table. That terrified and incensed me still more, for I understood that he was now going to conquer me by caresses, to inflame my passions until my reason was obscured. Three times we went round that table, I panting, defying him. "Let me alone. Beast! I hate you. Don't dare to touch me." And he, silent, with clenched teeth and

shining eyes, followed me. I grew fascinated. This man had been tracking me like this round and round for months, it seemed . . . in the end he'd get me. He'd seize me. His hated kisses would overcome me. And still we went round the table.

Suddenly he leaped on the table and made for me. I can still hear my scream. I eluded him, ran to the door, upsetting a chair in his way. I ran down the stairs, hatless, fortunately away from Piccadilly, and stopped at last on the other side of Berkeley Square, breathing hard, nearly crying. It was nearly dark and nobody noticed me. Two taxi drivers came and looked at me for a little while as I held on to the railings of the Square. Then one of them said, "She's tight," and they went away.

III

I didn't know what to do. I walked a long way. I went up Edgware Road and tried to buy a hat just before the shops closed. But I had no money, only Lord Alfred's check. A shop wouldn't change that. What was I going to do? I hadn't even got the penny halfpenny that was in my bag. Sleep somewhere, anyhow. Where could I go? I was somewhere near Maida Vale. I hesitated near a big public house, the Warrington Hotel, I think. There were lots of people in the saloon bar. I couldn't go in there. So I walked away, and such is the power of habit that I went southwest. I wondered if they would take me in at the Ritz, but I had no hat. Perhaps a woman would sell me her hat. But she couldn't change a hundred-pound check. I was frightened, too. I was too near Dover Street, so I went along Jermyn Street. There I had an idea. At a certain hotel Lord Alfred had twice given a dinner party. They knew him.

The reception clerk hesitated some time before giving me a room. He said there was only one left in the hotel. Obviously he wondered why I wasn't wearing a hat. Still, Lord Alfred's check and the familiar signature overcame him; he accepted my story that I'd had a motor accident. He must have said something to the chambermaid, for I'd hardly settled into my room when she brought me hot water and

asked whether I'd like to see the drawing-room where Lord Alfred would wait. Or should she show him up? I don't know what I said. I was too tired to mind what she assumed, nor was I even amused by the revelation of Lord Alfred's private life.

I stayed in that hotel a fortnight. I did nothing at all; whenever I went out I at once turned south. I couldn't risk meeting people in Piccadilly. I didn't know what I was going to do; besides, I was not feeling well. I wondered whether I was anæmic. I wanted to avoid people, so I lunched in chop houses in Fleet Street; I was too tired to think of what I would do. But I couldn't get away from people. One day, as I was lunching in the Strand, Frills came in. I ought to have known that a newspaper woman would hang about the Strand. She was very nice. Obviously she knew what had happened and was tactful enough to talk only of the aristocracy, but, though she asked me no questions, I must have let out that I was living in a hotel. I think I said some foolish thing about running out of the hotel and buying *Eve* at the bookstall in Duke Street. Anyhow, three days later, when I was lying on my bed in the afternoon, in the last stage of exhaustion, Julian came. I didn't want to speak to him, but I couldn't get out. He was between me and the door. Also, I was so seedy that as soon as he pleaded with me I began to cry. He profited by my weakness; he took me in his arms and tried to make me say I'd come back.

"I won't, I won't, I won't," I said again and again, crying all the time. He kissed me. At that I revolted, pushed him away.

"Little Bear!" cried Julian, and once more flung himself upon his knees, buried his face against me. Once more I felt my little boy needed me. Once more I had to dry those easy, appealing tears. A man who cries is ignoble and irresistible.

"All right," I said, at last, laying my hand upon his hair. "Let's make a fresh start." I despised myself abominably. Faithless, liar, practically thief, and I loved him all the same. That's loving. It's easy enough caring for an upright, handsome, clever man who loves you, but it's not love, not really.

To love really, you mustn't care how vile, how base is the creature you love. It's got to be just he. So I don't know that I ought to despise myself. I ought to envy myself for loving like that. Suddenly a feeling I had experienced before came over me and I freed myself.

"What is it?" he asked, afraid I was going to repulse him again.

"I don't know. Don't touch me. I feel ill." Then I turned away from his perplexed eyes and was just in time to reach the basin, where I was violently sick.

He was very sweet to me. He washed my face with water and eau de cologne, and helped me to the bed.

"Don't look at me," I said. "I know I look hideous. Ah! it's horrid being sick. I wonder what's the matter with me? I was like that two days ago."

"Oh!" he said, staring at me. "You look rather queer, Little Bear. Very pretty, of course, but thin in the face."

"Let me alone!" I snapped. I didn't want my appearance criticized just then. I only wanted to be comfortable, to get back to the flat and sleep.

We went back. Julian insisted on my seeing a doctor, who told me that in another seven months I would have a child. It was an awful feeling. What was I going to do? We couldn't marry. How could such a thing have happened to me?

"Don't worry," said Julian.

"How do you mean, don't worry! I'm going to have a child, and I'm not married. That's something to worry about, isn't it?"

"Well, you needn't have it," he said, slyly.

I understood at once. In my new world one did. I don't know why, but the suggestion enraged me. That sort of thing wasn't done.

"Well," said Julian, "if you won't you won't. We'll put it out to nurse, and perhaps we can get married, after all. I'll see about it." He was in a yielding mood, and very sweet to me in this extremity of my troubles. I sent Lord Alfred the seventy-eight pounds left of his check. Once more I was wholly Julian's.

PART IV. THE HOUSE OF CLOUD

Chapter I

Ripples

I

MATERNITY is an experience one can't forget. I don't mean merely from the physical point of view; I'm thinking rather of one's consciousness of a great event. Such a little event, after all. One that's happened millions of millions of times. That shows how important one thinks oneself in the world; I could laugh at myself as I think of it. One feels majestic, official, assistant in a sort of religious rite. If one can talk about it, one's friends are impressed. Those who have had no children are a little sorry for one, and a little envious. Those who have had children are faintly ghoulish. You're going to be put through it, poor wretch!

I didn't have that experience; being unmarried, I was ashamed and told nobody. Nor did Julian, even though I discerned in him a vague pride of fatherhood. I mustn't laugh at men for that, for we're quite as proud ourselves, and quite as unreasonable. I think that Julian was trying to gain time. One evening he said:

"Very few women are as good-looking after they've had a child as before."

"How can you talk such nonsense?" I asked. "As if you didn't know that nowadays the most run-after women are the women of thirty-five with three children, the girls being nowhere."

"I know," said Julian, "but it isn't for their good looks, exactly. They dress better. So I suppose we forgive the wear and tear." I said nothing.

I knew what he was playing for. He wanted to bring me to his own suggestion that the child should be got rid of. I

understood him, and I loved him all the same. That's true love.

But I wasn't going to get rid of that child. I knew that I was a fool. What should I do when it was born? Would Julian stick to me and my child? Smash, as Isabel said, and a worse smash. I couldn't go home with the child as I could without, if the worst came to the worst. I'd try to keep it, I supposed, work for a living, hand it over to some baby killer with twelve shillings a week. Or my people would be sorry for me and give me an allowance to go and live in the Shetlands or Australia. But in spite of, all that, I felt it must be born. Julian never made his suggestion again, but every now and then he hinted that the child would be a difficulty. The flat was too small to house it. Where could one get another flat in these days? It was a dashed nuisance. Of course the kid would be great fun, but it would make a hell of a row. Was I out of sorts? My complexion was very nice, but somehow he didn't like the look of me.

I took a malignant pleasure in watching him try to destroy my child, *my* child. But he shouldn't destroy it. . . . I don't know why I couldn't bear the idea. Indeed, by the end of October I was growing absorbed in the child, fed for it, exercised for it. It was to be a boy and be called Oswald. Why Oswald I don't know, for I never really loved Oswald. Perhaps my inner being revolted against the obvious name of Julian. For I hated the Julian I loved; I knew that I'd lost the man I'd held. My child must not evermore remind me of him. Did I love Julian then? I don't know. I felt I didn't know how; I felt Sadie. Oh, he was sweet and clever. He had appointments at half past six, which prevented him from coming home. That didn't point to Sadie. Now and then he had to see a man at a theater in the evening about frocks. And that didn't point to Sadie. Nothing and everything pointed to Sadie. I can't explain how we women feel these things. The man seems normal, but there's something in his voice, a change in the things he says; he's more elaborate with us; he advertises his movements unduly; his life is magnificently open. And the more he convinces

us that he is faithful, the more we know that he is not. I don't mean the nonsense about feminine intuition. It isn't that. It's precise little things; a sudden liking for something he didn't like before—pictures, the open air, exercise; or it's costume, such as a growing habit of wearing blue suits or a morning coat. Some woman likes pictures or the open air, or a morning coat. We know without knowing; we add up and add up. We sit down, thinking about it. We establish statistics of the events of a week. We remember something that a woman said about somebody else a year ago; we connect. Oh, it's no small job deceiving a woman that loves a man. There's only one way, and that is to do it under her nose, in her presence. The only thing she can't see is the obvious. But that requires audacity as well as technic.

I didn't make a scene. I knew it all the time. He hadn't given up Sadie. He was seeing her. He even mentioned her to me, and I knew that he mentioned her because he knew that I'd think it strange if he didn't mention her. Thus, by mentioning her he thought that I should take the reference as natural. But of course I knew that his truthtelling was a lie. It is inconceivable, but I didn't care. I still loved him and I didn't love my child, but I knew him, while my child was new. I was still young enough to be more interested in adventure than in memory.

II

I went to lunch with Lord Alfred. He wanted to see me, he said. He looked rather funny at lunch, very pink, and twisted his yellow mustache very often, as if he were going to say something embarrassing. The more he talked about plays and racing, the more I realized that he was going to say something intimate. He ate and drank a great deal, and only after coffee did he remark, blushing, "Miss Trent!"

I started, but somehow I was able to sham. "How do you mean, Miss Trent?" I said, but I know I blushed.

"Now don't be silly, Little Bear. You know I'm a pal. It's no use wriggling. Two days ago, at a dance, I had a

talk with a lady called Mrs. Osmaston. You know her, don't you?"

"Yes," I said, "but what's it got to do with me?"

"Everything, Little Bear. I know all about you."

"How could Isabel be such a sneak!"

"Your sister's not a sneak. I wormed it out of her. She seemed interested in the theatrical crowd, and so I talked a bit. The dance was given by the Duchess of Wiltshire; so, of course, the champagne was of the cheapest. Heavens! that ducal champagne! I'll never drink fizz except at a profiteer's in future. But never mind that. That champagne worked. I had to drown it in words. So we got talking of you."

"And Isabel gave me away!"

"No. She spotted who you were when I talked about Quin and his girl. How you women jump at things, I don't know. In the end she asked me to help you."

"Well, you've always helped me," I said, more gently.

"Not in the way she means. I've lent you your cab fare when you wanted it, but I've never tried to get you out of all this."

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. You seemed to be rubbing along like the other girls."

"And now you find out that I'm one of *your* sort, you feel different?"

"Now, Little Bear, don't be sarcastic. I'm not clever enough to spar with you. What I mean is sort of . . . well, you're not like the others. Sadie and Ninette and all that push. You're . . ."

"A sea anemone?"

"I don't know what you mean. Make it a rose."

I laughed at his cumbrous gallantry. "Never mind sea anemones. Go on. What do you want to do? Send me home to mamma?"

"You might do worse. I met Lady Trent once. I forget where. Nice old lady, with eyes like yours. She wouldn't be hard on you. Mrs. Osmaston told me your people were sort of hazy about the way you're living."

"Yes. But they know I was a manicurist; that I've been tipped."

"That was a long time ago," said Lord Alfred. "I mean to say, you've reformed. No, I don't mean that exactly. You know what I mean. Anyhow, why don't you chuck it? You're not so keen on your fellow as you were."

"How do you know?"

"I don't exactly know. Only those things wear off in time, don't they?"

I paused. He was right. Those things wore off, and I supposed I could stick it in the country. Then I remembered the child.

"Look here," I said, "you're awfully good to me, but I've got to tell you something. Don't let it go any farther till it's got to, but I'm going to have a child."

"Lor'!" said Lord Alfred. After a pause: "You're in a bit of a hole."

"I know. Let me sit in my hole. You can't do anything."

"Oh yes, I can! I can see that your kid finds some one to look after it at my place at Walmer, and get it educated, and all that sort of thing, but I don't mean that. I mean what's to become of you?"

I touched the back of his hand while no one was looking. "You're a dear," I said. "You can't do anything, really."

"Suppose I can't. I could marry you, of course, but it's against my principles. Still, if you think that would be any good, what about it?"

I laughed. "No, I won't take advantage of you. Mind you, I wouldn't make you any unhappier than anybody else, but it wouldn't be quite fair."

"Well, that's that," he said, with immense relief. He blew. "What an escape! But look here, Little Bear, as I see it, you can't go home. They'd misunderstand you. I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll see to it. You can go to Italy or China or somewhere, as companion to a lady. I'll find a woman to adopt the kid; that's better than putting it at Walmer, where the facts 'd come out. When you come back, you can go home."

"No, thank you, I won't do it."

We walked out together. Lord Alfred persistently talked of sending me home. Men always want to send girls home. We talked about it all the way. Lord Alfred had illusions about home. He asked me to think of mamma. He assured me I'd get married. The liftman having disappeared, we walked up the stairs, Lord Alfred still advocating the home. On our landing we paused.

"Look here, Little Bear," he said, "I knew you were a silly kid. All women are. But you're about the limit. Once more, let me lose it for you. You'll have no bother."

"No, it's very good of you, but I won't."

He sighed. "Well then, since you must have it, you must. When it's born I'll have it looked after, as I told you, at Walmer, and you won't need to hear any more about it unless you want to. And if you like, if you're fed up with Quin, I'd better start you in a hat shop or something. Get you your own business. Wouldn't cost more than a thousand or two. Oh," he added, interrupting me, "it ain't charity. I shall expect seven per cent out of it."

I took his fat, pink cheeks between my hands, drew his head down and kissed him. I was too moved to speak, and went into the flat, slamming the door in his face so that he should not see me crying. Some men upset one by their decency.

III

And life went on. Still I lunched with people, and met people, the same people. Still we talked of the club with the best floor, and the best band; still we exchanged jokes about America going dry; still the affairs of Ida Quin, of Lockwood, Appleford and Tootoo, of Mr. Pawlett and Christine, were discussed. People met, people came together, parted, were betrayed. Money was put into things which came off, or which didn't; So-and-so got the bird at a music hall. It was like living inside a whirligig. Seldom a new face, always the same figures revolving in a complicated dance of death,

while I went lonely and unhappy, yet elated by my burden of life.

Incidents detach themselves. Satterthwaite was doing very well now. Curbed by his new partners, he was developing slowly; luck brought him a new film on "the social evil," which was drawing every puritan and moralist in the country. Lord Alfred was very pleased; he had a great deal of money, but all the same he liked to put it into successful things, and Satterthwaite already promised a dividend of fifteen per cent. But the old man was very tribal. Though he boasted of the big things he was going to do in the cinema world, he never forgot that it was Julian had helped him. He came to see me now and then, to talk of his plans.

"It's funny, Mrs. Quin," he remarked one day, "some go up and some go down."

"As on the wheel of Fortune," I said.

"What's the wheel of Fortune?"

"Tennyson. 'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel . . .' I forget the rest."

"Tennyson? That's an ideer, Mrs. Quin. The audience has heard of Tennyson. Tell you what I'll do. I'll have a moral film to show that money ain't happiness. Shove some Tennyson on the screen when convenient. Tennyson! That's tony; but not too tony."

He went on talking of his family. Leopold was doing wonderfully in Chicago. He would have helped his old father if it hadn't been that, somehow, the cable wasn't delivered in time. Esther had completely reformed, had given up socialism and married a man who ran fourteen fish shops in the East End.

"Course, they don't live there," said Satterthwaite, magnificently. "They've got a house in Belsize Park, and a booffay nearly as big as mine. Ah! If it weren't for Reuben. That religion, Mrs. Quin, it's a good thing—I got nothing against it—but it don't pay. Not as a rule. Of course, there was Prophet Dowie, and I suppose Moody and Sankey didn't do so badly, but it's chancy, Mrs. Quin, very chancy." I laughed. "I don't know why you laugh at me.

Still, it doesn't matter. I won't forget what you did for me. All along of that, I'll be able to afford Reuben becoming a rabbi."

I did not undeceive him. I had to let him go on, thanking me, blessing Julian, knowing all the time that Julian had broken him for his own advantage, and again for his own advantage set him up once more. One can't always tell the truth.

At that time we had another excitement, for Tootoo at last married Appleford. The wedding was at St. Anne's, Soho; our set came, very grave, and trying to find their way in the prayer book. Karl Meerbrook had to be restrained from talking aloud because the organist's rendering of "O Perfect Love" irritated him. I remember Tootoo's small, trim back as she knelt by the side of Mr. Appleford, his sleek hair, and the voice of the clergyman mixing steadily with Meerbrook's grumbles of: "Now! Detach! Ah, he won't do it . . . Oh, my! oh, my!"

"Don't talk, Mr. Meerbrook," I whispered. I thought the organ was all right. But no! Behind me a hoarse whisper: "More wind! more wind! . . . Oh, you devil!" It was a comic wedding. We went into the vestry to kiss and congratulate Tootoo, one of the foremost being Ninette, who came with her husband; Arf a Mo' behaved very badly. Assisted by Mr. Eaton, a young airman, he converted the vestry into an abode of love. They both kissed me; Lord Alfred kissed Frills. Everybody kissed, as one does in silly moods. Finally Arf a Mo' forced us to join hands with The Woman, the two Freelands, our other friends, and various people we didn't know, and to dance wildly round the bewildered pair. Ninette, whom weddings made sentimental, wept; she repulsed her consoling husband, and was furious when Arf a Mo' whispered too loudly to Ida Quin that what Ninette wanted from Roderick was a thick ear. At last the clergyman, very smooth, decided to smile and to pat us all on the back, meanwhile pushing us out of the vestry. "These theatrical weddings!" he said, charitably, as he drove me out.

And life went on. Strong rumors started that Mrs. Free-

land was going to divorce her husband. I had often met smart young Bob Freeland, and he'd been audacious to me. It appeared that he had succeeded Bill Gordon in the affections of The Woman, and that his wife had found it out. She hesitated a long time between doing the same, which would have produced a really Bohemian menage; rumor said that she was waiting for co-respondents to accumulate, in which case her divorce would have been much smarter. Soon after he was served with a writ, Bob Freeland tried to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Thames. But as he did it off the Embankment at four o'clock in the afternoon, he can't have meant business. He was fished out, and photographed by the *Daily Mirror*. Mrs. Freeland appeared at the police court and got him off. She was photographed by the *Daily Sketch*. It was a very successful affair, and we all enjoyed it very much. The divorce case was adjourned.

All through this I was asking myself what would happen to me and my child. It was to be born at the end of April, and though I often wondered what I should do, I was becoming lymphatic. Perhaps I felt that somebody would help me. Perhaps I was still too secure. As one of the Trents, happen what might, I must be all right. Perhaps it was merely benevolent nature keeping me quiet for my child's good. Anyhow, I didn't worry much. I slept a lot. I was very good-tempered. I was not exacting. Indeed, at that time I was happy. Life didn't matter. That is perhaps the best thing life can do for a human being.

Chapter II

Facing It Out

I

IT was no surprise to me that Julian should so soon give up Sadie. I think I would have known it without indications other than those secret ones arising from my instinct. Somehow, in November, I found him more attentive. He wanted to know how I felt, whether I wanted anything. He brought me a large piece of flowered damask, which I had admired in a cushion shop. Gifts! Men make us presents as a rule when they have deceived us, because they feel remorseful; the wife is wise who grows suspicious when suddenly her husband gives her a diamond pendant. I had been told of that indication. But surely Julian had not already entered into another adventure! Rather, he was trying to put things right. The piece of damask told me that it was all over with Sadie and that he wanted to begin again where we'd left off.

Well, call me undignified if you like, but I felt so ill, so lonely, that I accepted him. It wasn't that I wanted his caresses much, but I wanted him to talk, to smile, to be my friend. If I hadn't been as I was, I suppose I should have developed energy enough to leave him for good. But when a woman is about to become a mother she needs a man badly. The fact of his being there is a sort of protection, an insurance. I don't mean that I wanted somebody to keep my child; it was vaguer than that; I just wanted somebody. So, little by little, I suppose I should have forgotten Sadie, should have buried that memory of unfaithfulness under the garment of tolerance that every woman packs away with her wedding gown, to take out when the colossus crashes on his

feet of clay, to cover him with it, and pretend that underneath lies the image of old.

I should have forgotten. Have I not half forgotten the awful day when mamma, who's very Victorian, lost her temper with me and beat me with her shoe until I bled? I only half remember, and I love her all the same. I should have not forgotten, but remembered mistily, and come to love him again if he let me.

But Sadie didn't let me. Somebody told me that she was sailing for America in a few days. She had a job there, in Arizona. That concorded with the piece of damask, and I was immensely glad to think that she was going. It wasn t that I feared her; what was over was over, but it would be easier to forget a woman in another continent. I knew the date of her sailing, and a sense of the picturesque made me suggest a little dinner on the night, to which we would ask only such friends as didn't care what they drank or what they said. Julian agreed. For a moment it annoyed me that he should agree so easily; he didn't mourn her even on the day of her sailing. Would he mourn me on the day of my inevitable sailing to an unknown shore? Almost at once I ceased to care, for a woman, at bottom, always believes that he will mourn on the day of her sailing, however lightly he may take the departure of another.

II

The little dinner did not take place. Among my letters, that morning, came one from Sadie. I read it twice, hardly understanding it. Then, quietly, I put it away, saying nothing to Julian, who, across the table, phlegmatically glanced at the *Daily Mail* and munched eggs and bacon. I said hardly anything. Not only was the revelation too awful, but the way in which it was put! Sadie didn't talk like that. She wasn't coarse or vulgar, beyond an oath or two. It seemed as if she had thought out the terms of her letter to hurt me, to outrage me all she could.

You silly, moon-faced kid, I suppose you think you've got your dandy fellow roped! I suppose you think you've taught him to behave when the wife's in the country, and that the rest of his life he'll be as good as gold, just because you gave him the what-for with the chill off! Why you think he'd stick to a bit of pastry like you more than to anybody else, I don't know. But then you always were stuck up. So let me give you a tip, as a pal: you keep your eye on your dandy fellow. Don't you think he's going to live like a curate just because I'm out of the way; it isn't his nature. If you don't believe me you ask Maud Freeland why she stopped her divorce. It wasn't because she hadn't got cause. No fear! It was because Maudie knew that there might be a bit of an account against her if the King's Proctor found out about her and your Julian. You ask her, suddenly, if you don't believe me, and you'll see, unless you're too much of a worm to risk it. You ask Christine who she was with before she was handed over to Pawlett. You bet Julian knew a bit about Christine before he landed her on Pawlett. A bit of fluff like her didn't say no to Julian, who's a beauty, I'll say that for him. But there, he never can keep away when he sees a bit of skirt. He couldn't even let poor little Frills alone. *She* couldn't say no. To say nothing about the two women on the first floor. Under your very feet, you juggins! You make me sick! I suppose you'll stick to him, if you don't mind my leavings, if you don't mind those of the rest of the town.

SADIE.

Rather dully I went out at the usual time, walked along the usual Piccadilly. I read the letter under the arches of the Ritz, but it was an inconvenient place, so I went into Stewart's to eat cakes and read it again. I don't think I quite grasped it for a couple of hours. In the afternoon I tried to make plans. I was past misery and only wanted to get away. I'd no reason to doubt Sadie, and, anyhow, she alone was cause enough. But my purpose hardened, not so much because I believed all this as because Julian was irrevocably soiled by living in such a world, in a world where such imputations against him might be true. At four o'clock I was clear that I must go. I would ask Lord Alfred for those seventy-eight pounds I returned him. I supposed he'd help me through until my child came, and then I'd see. He

could set me up as a milliner, or marry me, or send me home. I didn't care. I began to pack. It was exhausting, having to bend down again and again to pick up things. There were such lots of oddments—silver pin trays, handkerchief boxes, nightgown cases, razors for the under arm, and bottles and bottles. At last I upset a bottle of liquid blacking over three crêpe-de-Chine chemises, and burst into tears. Searching for a handkerchief in the trunk, I got my fingers into the blacking, wiped my eyes, thus transferring much of the black liquid to my face. I saw myself in the looking-glass and sobbed.

Then Julian came in. He stared at my wet and blackened face.

"Good heavens! What's the matter, Little Bear?"

"I'm going," I said, unsteadily.

"Going? Why?"

I got up, handed him the letter. As he read it my tears stopped and rage rose in me. He read it to the end, seemed quite cool, then handed it back.

"That's all rot."

"Is it? How long have you known the people Sadie talks about?"

"What's that?"

"Answer my question."

"Oh, four or five years."

"Who were you living with before you took up with me? With those women?"

"Oh, I don't deny that before I met you I behaved like other men."

He did not deny the names, so I said, "And you ask me to believe that for a whole year you've been going about with your former mistresses and kept faith with me?"

He blustered, but he was just a moment too late. He had hesitated; I had seen him calculate. He must have understood that, for he suddenly decided to ask for forgiveness.

"Well, yes, since you will have it. It isn't true, all this,

but some of it, yes. Oh, Little Bear, you don't understand."

"No."

"You don't know how weak one is. One gets entangled."

"*I* don't," I said, with an air of rectitude.

"It isn't the same thing. A man slips into these things. They don't mean much to him."

"I suppose I didn't mean much to you?"

"You're the only woman I ever loved."

I don't know why, but that enraged me. Perhaps because it was a formula. I lost my temper.

"Don't talk to me. Don't lie to me. You've done nothing but lie to me for a year, done nothing but make me a laughing-stock. It's because of you that a woman like Sadie can insult me and crow over me. You found me when I was free, and you've dragged me down, ruined me. It's because of you that I've got to go out into the world with your child. How many other women have you treated like that, you devil? You beast! How many other girls have you made the joke of your friends? Except those you've sold to rich men?" He moved toward me. "Don't touch me. If you dare to touch me, I'll scream, I'll hit you." He came nearer. "If you dare to touch me I'll kill you, you beast!" As his hand moved I looked round for a weapon. But he seized me by both arms and tried to draw me toward him. Heaven knows what he wanted me for. My memories become vague. Rage clouded my brain. I was struggling with him, trying to keep out of his arms. I heard him pant as I drove him against the wall. I remember the hissing of his breath, a sudden contact of his cheek against mine, a kiss that made me frantic with fury, the crash of his head against the wardrobe, and the joy of it, for I wanted to hurt him. My blouse was torn, and hung round one shoulder. My hair came down over my face. I knew only that I wanted to get away, to run as I was, away, anywhere. At last I had an idea. He was holding both my wrists. I suddenly swung round, so as to hurl him against the wardrobe. As I did so, he let me go, falling to

the floor, but the impetus of my movement carried me across the room. I tripped on the open trunk and fell.

III

When I regained consciousness, I was in the same room, in bed. Something seemed to have happened to it, for everything was beautifully tidy. A pleasant, elderly man stood by my bedside. There was a nurse, too. They talked to me kindly, told me I'd been stunned and would soon be all right. It was only in the night, after I knew that now I would have no child, that I reconstructed the scene. I had fallen down, I remembered that. I was quiet now, after being in pain, but rather light-headed. The nurse looked different from the one I'd seen in the afternoon. I think I was delirious for three or four days, during which monstrous visions occupied my mind. Sometimes I discovered the last scene and heard myself scream. Then I was with Mrs. Vernham, and recited idiotic love passages between lords and ladies. Occasionally I felt a coldness on my head—ice, perhaps. And the face of Julian forms, very lovely and sorrowful. But why did I hate it so?

Then I'm conscious again and very weak. I know what has happened. I know that I have two nurses. Julian comes twice a day for half an hour, and I let him talk. I'm too weak to hate him. I like the doctor. He doesn't talk about illness and strange cases, as the nurses do all the time. He admires my dressing jacket.

It was only a week later that I understood my situation completely. That fall had made an end of my child. Strangely enough, I did not feel relief. If I'd been sensible then, I should have been glad, for what should I have done with it? But I was disappointed. I'd been done out of adventure. And I felt so ill. I had to go into a nursing home for some obscure operation. People were rather grave when they talked to me; I was allowed no visitors until the 4th or 5th of December. In the middle of the month, when I felt stronger, Julian spent an hour with me. He was charm-

ing; I nearly forgave him, not because he looked anxious, but because I had suffered so much that hate had run out of me with pain; as if suffering had cleansed me of pettiness. After he had denied Sadie's accusations, at which I smiled without anger, after he had protested his love for me, which I chose to believe, I said:

"Don't let's talk about it any more. Let's forget it. Let's start again."

At once he smiled like a little boy forgiven, kissed my hand, and said: "Phew! I'll be glad to get you home again. You used to smell of mille fleurs, but now it's lysol."

I was discharged just before Christmas, after seeing many visitors. It's funny having visitors when one's in bed. One's in bed such a long time, and visitors say so little. One hates sick people, really; one doesn't know what to say to them. One knows it isn't good for them to talk of their illness, and one doesn't know what else to talk about. Invalids have seen nobody, or nothing; they have no news, so one can't gossip with them. One stays. One is bored. One glances covertly at one's watch. One gets away when one can. Ninette came with Roderick, and Arf a Mo' by himself. Everybody brought me grapes. They were flattering, but most of them went early.

A constant visitor was Frills. I think the little woman felt guilty because she had told Julian where I lived when I ran away. So she too brought me grapes, and great budgets of news about people I didn't know. Ninette was more amusing when she came without Roderick, and wanted to know exactly how much I'd been hurt. I felt shy at first, then indulged her; her beautiful eyes glowed like green lights. I think she was envious.

Then there was Satterthwaite. The old Jew was perfect; the first time he brought an aunt of seventy-five, a Mrs. Mosenberg. As she sat down in a corner, knitted all the time, and did not look at me, I gathered that Montmorency had brought her as a chaperon. He was very sweet, full of gossip, full of plans, promising to put back his new big film a fortnight, so that I might be well enough to come to the private

view. He was fatherly, and patted my arm with a large hand, so fat as to be almost globular. He was so very sorry for me, so certain that all this was Julian's fault, and so incapable of saying an ill word against the man who had helped him.

"He's so young," he said. That was as far as Satterthwaite could blame. I believed his chaperon worried him a little, for at the end of the interview he talked in a lower voice. Was I quite happy? Did I want anything? Everything he had was mine. I grew sure that Satterthwaite was moved when he came alone, next day. He behaved quite respectfully, but he suddenly had a burst. "Chaperons! Ach! what nonsense! I'm old enough to be your father."

Dear old man! He wasn't really old—fifty, perhaps—but he was the only practical person I knew. While the others offered me things I wasn't allowed to eat, and all without exception brought me the *Bystander* or *Pan*, without considering that everybody else would bring them, too, Satterthwaite was worthily active. It was he ordered a car to fetch me on the day I left the home; he, too, reminded Julian to order a petite marmite and boiled fowl for my first dinner. (Healthy, but beastly.) It was even Satterthwaite who saw Beatrice and made her put out my sheets to air before the fire.

I didn't find it out at first. I thought it was Julian, and nearly forgave him entirely. But not quite. I couldn't. It wasn't that I had anything precise against him, for we'd blotted that out, but there was something missing between us; my sense of safety was gone. The first evening, as I went to bed, I hesitated for a moment before the door. Then I locked it. Well, I'd done it. I didn't suppose that could go on forever, for we couldn't live like that, but I couldn't yet leave the door unlocked. On the third evening Julian rattled the handle, then desisted. Nothing was said about it, but he didn't try again. I confess it was the fact that he did not try again parted us completely. He was gadding about, and, though very nice, going out every eve-

ning. We were going away on the 21st to stay at Walmer with Lord Alfred. I was deeply offended. Julian ought to try to reconquer me. Even if he failed, it was better he should try. I brooded over this a good deal, though I had other troubles. I looked hideous; my arms and legs felt like gelatine. Still, I brooded over it, for a woman finds it harder not to be wanted by a man than a man to be rejected by a woman. That's partly because she can't make advances, or thinks she can't. Also because a man, as a rule, can console himself with somebody else. A woman's too particular.

Chapter III

Alec

I

AT the last moment I nearly refused to go down to Lord Alfred's place. I looked too hideous. After being ill and a long time in bed, one's hair gets dull. I didn't expect the sea air would assist it much. My skin was . . . almost mottled, and no man would have seen his features in my eyes except as a bad photograph. But Julian overruled me, and I went to please him. He had sinned against me, so I couldn't do anything else.

Notley, which Lord Alfred referred to as "his little place in Kent," was an enormous brick house on two floors, in the shape of an E without the middle tongue. It stood about a mile south of Walmer Castle, rather askew to the sea, but so near as to have been affected by a landslip twenty years before, which had made the north wing unsafe. Notley was mostly corridors; the north wind seemed to enjoy so much entering at one end and coming out of the other that it went in again as soon as it came out. If the oak doors had not been fitted in the eighteenth century they would have flapped as in a bungalow. Notley was very like Lord Alfred. Some rooms had been furnished by Chippendale; others combined Heppelwhite furniture with maple beds, liberty hangings. I never saw so many oddments in a house, and the untidiness was extreme. Lord Alfred seemed to have dropped his fishing rods in my bedroom. In a sort of cellar I found three pianos, which, Lord Alfred said, "must have come from somewhere." It was a real bachelor's house, where the servants adored their master, seldom answered bells, and, I believe, made love in the drawing-room. It was significant

that the twenty-year-old landslip had only now been noticed, and that was why Lord Alfred's architect was staying in the house. He came in the nick of time.

We possessed all the elements of a jolly party. Besides Julian and me, Lord Alfred had invited Ninette and Roderick, also two odd girls, one with red hair, who was called "Dick," and a little thing who fluffed out her fair hair and insisted on being called Gaby. There was alsc the architect, Mr. Brough; on Christmas Eve our host informed us that he expected that some men would float in sometime.

How we ate! At Lord Alfred's they didn't dust much, but they cooked. In three days he made us eat six Christmas dinners, drink so much liquor that I believed him when he said that he got it cheap from smugglers who landed it at his front door. It was rather fun, for on Christmas night we all got into pajamas, and I was lightheaded enough to dance. Another dance was going on in the servants' quarters, judging from the sounds. I liked it, for everybody got so untidy that I didn't look so dreadful as I might have. But I wasn't a success. Lord Alfred told me that Little Bears didn't have the hump, which was reserved by camels. Julian danced a lot with "Dick," which annoyed me. It should not, but the red-haired girl seemed to like him so much, and laid her head upon his shoulder as they danced. Of course, she'd had much too much to drink. I had a silly wrangle with Julian, I forget about what, when we went upstairs. Perhaps it was because my hot water was nearly frozen. Also the bath was out of order. I can't stand chaos.

It was the sort of holiday when one wants to quarrel. It froze on Christmas Day, and froze harder the day after. In despair I went out alone, and came back with streaming red eyes, to find the architect warming himself at the fire, with a sheep dog asleep in his arms. This did me good, and I laughed out loud to see him nursing this enormous creature. I observed him better now, though I had danced with him as one dances with people without bothering about them. He looked about thirty-five, was shortish, broad, rather undistinguished in feature. He had gray eyes and a reddish

cropped mustache; he wore loose gray tweeds which didn't suit his complexion. But he had a good voice, and a sort of blunt self-assurance that was not unpleasing. His Christian name, I gathered, was Alec, for all the women except me used it.

"Hullo!" he said. "Been out? Plucky thing to do."

"Yes. I'm frozen."

"Have a warm?" He painfully shifted along the hearth-rug, dragging the dog with him; after a moment's hesitation I sat on the chair.

"It's freezing stiff," he said. "There 'll be no hunting this side of the New-Year."

"You hunt?"

"Yes, now and then. I go down to Stow-on-the-Wold for a run with the Heythrop."

"Do you?" I said, excitedly. "Perhaps I know your friends?" Then I blushed. I oughtn't to have said that.

"Maybe. I stay with Jack Hunbury as a rule. Perhaps you know his wife?"

"No. . . . I've heard the name."

"Oh! Sometimes, when they can't have me, I put up at the 'Spotted Pig.'"

We talked about hunting for a little while. It was so nice. I felt like so long ago. But after a time I thought the subject too risky. I didn't want him to talk about me down there, and deliver another blow at poor mamma. So I tried to get on to his own topic, which generally gets men off all others. "How do you find time to hunt? Isn't an architect tied up in town?"

"I escape now and then. Mind you, when I say escape I don't mean I don't like my work."

"Must be awfully exciting."

"I don't know. One makes something. That's good enough."

"How do you mean, good enough?"

He looked faintly hostile, as if annoyed at not being understood.

"Making something," he said. "Well, that's all one's got to do in the world. See what I mean?"

I saw. He was rather interesting, this faintly rough man. He went on talking. I found that he had been to Cambridge, that he had had a partner, then set up on his own, because he couldn't agree with another man. But we grew intimate only when we discovered a mutual friend, Satterthwaite. It seemed that Alec Brough had planned several picture houses for the old man.

"Of course, I don't know him really." As he said that he looked like a horse that's going to shy. He must have felt that, for he explained: "One meets a lot of people in my trade. People are queer. And one needn't bother about them."

"You mean you live your own life?"

"Well, yes. One doesn't want to take up with people. They distract one." Then he grew silent, and I found great difficulty in making him explain. I gathered in mangled sentences that Brough thought that a man could do good work only if he remained lonely. "All this sort of thing," he said, jerking his head toward the sound of a gramophone in some room, "it sort of dissipates you. You know."

"I'm afraid I don't. All my life is dissipation, I suppose."

"May be the best way for you. I'm not going to lay down the law about how you ought to live. Quite busy enough finding out how to do it myself."

"You don't look like that," I said, half surprised by my indiscretion.

He did not reply, but, ridding himself of the sheep dog, which he placed upon its back so that he could tickle its chest: "You like dogs?"

I replied, but observed that he had not answered my question. Nor did he ever. He played with the dog and I went in.

I don't know why, but somehow the presence of Alec Brough provided me that day and the next with a certain reassurance. He had the voice of a university and the manners of a plowboy; the contrast was rather pleasing. That afternoon, after tea, he came sidling up to me and

ungraciously remarked that, if I liked, he'd show me his plans to secure the north wing, if I thought I could understand them. So, nettled, I went to the workshop he had set up in the damaged quarter, and was shown those wearisome plans that no woman in the world can grasp, or wants to grasp, where one picks out a stippled section and says intelligently, "Is that a dado?" and is told, "No, it's a drain." Alec Brough was a real man; he actually talked to me of stresses. To this day I don't know if a stress is a tool or a metaphor, but I was lucky.

"I see," I said. "You're putting granite on the sea side and brick on the land side, because you think that the house 'll tilt if the land slips again."

He brought his hands together almost with a clap. "By Jove!" he said, "how did you get at that?" I was prudent enough to say nothing and just to smile. "Well, that's it." He embarked into elucidations that elucidated nothing. He summed up, "Mrs. Quin, you might have made an architect." From architecture we went on to art in general. He knew many things I'd never heard of, but he was queer, as if afraid to boast. On my remarking that he seemed to know all the foreign literature, he almost snarled: "Of course I don't, and don't want to. I haven't time to be stirred up. They talk of Russian revolutions coming out of the people! Revolutions come out of books. All the French Liberalism of '48, you'll find it in Stendhal twenty years before." Then he grinned. "But I'm not sure that the biggest revolution wasn't the invention of the bathroom. People talk of kings, and socialism, and all that, but I say baths and armor-bright stoves. That's how you change the mentality of people." He interested me, for his materialism was injected with something enthusiastic that half hurt him. He must have felt that I understood that, for again in the evening he singled me out, while Lord Alfred and three others played bridge, and Julian and "Dick" larked in the corridors. As we played billiards, I think I became more woman to him, for I found his eyes resting upon me seriously while he chalked his cue. He opened his mouth to speak, changed

his mind. He disturbed me, and I began to think him rather good-looking, for his eyes were steady and his nose was straight. I was curious to see his mouth without that reddish mustache. The under lip was sulky and sensitive, but then the upper lip reveals the man.

Some time after I went up Julian came in. He looked rather dissipated, his hair ruffled over one ear, his shirt front askew. But he was quite amiable. "Well, Little Bear," he said, as he took off his shoes, "you been enjoying yourself mashing the architect?"

"How do you mean, mashing?" I said, sitting up. Then I laughed. I felt ridiculous.

"Perhaps it wasn't mashing," said Julian, amiably. "Perhaps you don't mean anything, while the poor fellow's got it in the midriff."

"How can you talk such nonsense?"

He came up to me, stroking my arm. He wanted to tease me. "He isn't bad-looking, but not exactly your style, I should have thought. You like us more emaciated, don't you?"

"Don't be silly."

He went on chaffing me, while I sulked. Then he kissed and caressed me into a good humor, for he seemed very pleased with himself and painfully tolerant. He went to sleep before I did, and I lay awake, considering that it was bad-mannered of Julian to worry so little over my apparent attraction to Mr. Brough. Also I was curious to see my new friend again. A strange fellow, obviously an artist in his rough way. I went to sleep vaguely looking forward to the morrow.

II

Next day was an agitated one. To begin with, when I decided to go out in the morning, I found Mr. Brough lounging in the hall and smoking a pipe with the air of a man who is waiting for something to do. We talked for a moment, and just as I was awkwardly wondering whether I

should go, leaving him there, he said, "What are you doing in this crowd?"

"What?" I said.

"Yes. With all these people. They aren't your sort."

"I don't know what you mean," I replied, with dignity.

"Oh, well, have it as you like."

I was speechless. I still wasn't used to having things said straight out, and yet I did not walk off with my head in the air. To begin with, I had just caught sight of myself in the looking-glass. That sort of face didn't fit in with dignity. So, instead of flaring up, I flopped on to a chair and began to cry, I don't know why, except that I felt ill and forlorn. As I dried my eyes I noticed, first in amazement, and then in gratitude, that Alec Brough couldn't have seen those rapid tears, for he was kneeling on the hearthstone, cleaning his pipe, and at intervals softly cursing. I stared at his back for a moment. A broad back. Perhaps I was wrong to think that gray tweeds didn't suit him. His collar had a beautiful gloss; his hair was cut very close at the back. When at last he moved, as if to give me a hint, I murmured, quite gently, "I don't quite understand, Mr. Brough."

"No?" he asked, turning round and filling his pipe, still not looking at me. "One doesn't understand when one doesn't want to, does one? Still, perhaps I'd better say nothing more. I'd better mind my own business."

"I suppose so," I said, but at once the coldness vanished, and, burying my face in my hands, I began to cry loudly, uncontrollably. He must have watched me for a moment, wondering what to do. Then a rather large, hard hand patted me gently on the shoulder, and a soft voice said: "Go on, cry. It 'll do you good."

I looked up at him in spite of my wet face. Men always say, "Don't cry." They always try to do you out of the relief of tears. He seemed to understand me. As this idea stopped my tears, he smiled at me and said: "All over? April shower? Not an English summer, I observe."

I smiled, and began to dab at my eyes, motioning him to turn away. "Don't look at me. I look awful."

"I don't know about awful, but you do look a bit damp."

"Why do you bother about me?" I said.

"Well, you look unhappy."

"That means I look ugly, doesn't it?"

"No." Judicially, "Not ugly."

"*Thank* you."

"I don't want to pay you any compliments. Going out?" I nodded. "Suppose we walk into Deal and buy a penn'orth of pins?"

I laughed, and we went together, staying out until lunch. I didn't tell Julian. If he knew and was jealous, so much the better. But as we came back I was rather more nervous of Julian's possible jealousy, for I had enjoyed Alec Brough's society. My pleasure made me feel guilty. We talked a good deal, and though I couldn't tell him how I was situated, I let him understand that I was a stranger among the "Dicks" and the "Gabys." Somehow, too, he conveyed that he found pleasure in my awful appearance, for he looked at me several times a little longer than he need have done. Oh, it does one such a lot of good to have a man look at one when one's feeling ugly! One begins to hope. By degrees one begins to think that one can't be as ugly as all that. I knew a little more about him. It seemed that he was a bachelor, and that he had quarreled with his people because before he wanted to be an architect he'd wanted to be a painter. "They'd rather I said I wanted to be a burglar," he remarked. "They were right, though; they always said I couldn't paint. So I took to bricks and mortar, and now I'm a reformed character. They're willing to forgive me, so I let 'em forgive me on occasional holidays. But it's not the same thing. One can't forgive one's people having been against one."

"They always are," I said, savagely.

"I suppose so. Can't be helped. It's the old patriarch of the tribe idea, who kicked his sons out of the tribe when they grew up. Didn't like children."

"It's worse now," I replied. "The patriarchs don't kick out their children; they make them stay."

We got on very well. It seemed that he had a house in Hampstead, with a garden full of hollyhocks, a housekeeper who bullied him for his own good, two sheep dogs who did a lot of harm to the garden, a large tabby cat who did a lot of harm to the sheep dogs, an office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a bundle of muddled dreams about creating a new architectural style. As he put it: "The Elizabethans did a bit for us, and the Tudors, and so did the Georgians. We've got to do something better than brick shops with a stone facing, which by a sort of magic stands on plate glass."

"Oh, I see. It's our duty to posterity to leave them something."

"Duty's a fake," replied Brough. "We've got no duty to posterity. Christopher Wren wasn't thinking of me when he built St. Paul's. He built St. Paul's because he liked doing it. There's only one way to make a good building, and that's to make a building you like. Enjoy yourself. That's what life's for."

I did not like to say that it was difficult to enjoy oneself in life. We got back to find that two men had floated in, as Lord Alfred put it. One was a racing man called Sheridan, the other a rather villainous, elderly, handsome person, called Herbert Padbury, who sat next to me at lunch, and within five minutes touched my hand twice. I was furious, then remembered that Alec Brough seemed to find me attractive. Was I getting attractive again? I was so excited that I got my pocket mirror out of my little bag. Everybody laughed, for they thought I was going to powder at table, but I didn't mind. Yes, I was certainly improving.

In the afternoon we motored to Canterbury, and came back *via* Ashford. That is, Lord Alfred drove, with Gaby by his side, while at the back were packed Julian, myself, Mr. Padbury, and Ninette. Of course Julian had to attend to Ninette, so Padbury devoted himself to me. He was a queer, rather nasty person, but I didn't quite dislike him. He said cynical things that made one laugh. But I didn't know what to do, for Julian openly put his arm round

Ninette's waist, and I couldn't prevent Mr. Padbury's doing the same.

"What's the matter?" he said. "You're keeping up the conventions, and I'm not. There's your husband with the other girl, sitting opposite you, while my poor wife is eating her heart out at home."

He persecuted me, too, when we got back. He maneuvered me into corners. He wanted to know whether I'd come for a run in his two-seater. Also, his home being out of London, he had a flat in town. Wouldn't I come and have tea and see his topping Chinese ivories? I was irritated to find that Alec Brough didn't help me at all. He seemed more interested in Mr. Sheridan, with whom he talked racing. After tea they even went away together to dig out a copy of *Ruff's Guide* from the library. But the climax came only next day. Suddenly the frost stopped; a soft southwester was blowing, promising rain, and carrying the deceptive suggestion of spring which one sometimes feels in the winter in the home counties. In the afternoon the sun fell so soft that I decided to visit the Italian garden, which fell away in terraces toward the south.

The garden was beautiful. A broad flagged terrace gave upon a colonnade, flanked by two stone pots large as barrels, which housed each one an old box tree. Between balustrades that curved away, steps led to another terrace, a broad flower bed, empty now, but which shepherded the eye toward another terrace, still broader, that carried a lawn, and finally abutted into the deep horizon of the spreading garden that flatly ran away to the infinite sea. The prospect was immensely satisfying. It went step by step into the undefined; it held peace and harmony. I stood there for a long time, and at last walked down to rest my hand awhile upon the stone balustrade, feeling that I ought to have my hair powdered, and to be wearing paniers of flowered silk, like Marie Leczinska. Then I told myself that it really looked more like Denby Sadler. I'm not good at make-believe. Make, rather than believe, is in the line of the modern girl.

After a while I noticed that a figure was peering into the rush-grown pond at the bottom of the last terrace, where a few aged carp cynically circled. It was Herbert Padbury. He annoyed me. I would have said to him as Diogenes to Alexander, "Get out of my sunshine." But it was too late to go, for he had seen me; he waved a cigar-bearing hand and cried: "Come down and look at these old fish, Mrs. Quin. I wish I had my rod, though I don't suppose they'd bite."

I went toward him. I could do no other. For a moment we watched the carp, that stared at us, and even came to the surface, as if expecting food.

"Aren't they lovely?" I said. "Just like those fish you see on that funny skim-milk china—you know, the Copenhagen stuff."

"Yes, they aren't bad. Look at that one, brown with a touch of gold, just like your eyes."

"Eyes the color of a carp! That's hardly flattering."

"One must take one's similes where one finds them. If only you didn't look away I'd think of something more poetic."

"It's very nice of you," I replied, "because, if you want to know, at present I think I look like a boiled rabbit."

"I like rabbits," said Mr. Padbury, throwing me an approving glance. "But you aren't a rabbit. More like a Persian kitten, one of those reddy-brown ones that have stolen a couple of stars to look out of, and down from an angel's wing to make their fur."

"You're very flowery," I said. But my smile vanished, for he took me by the arm, apparently careless of those who might watch from the windows. "That's enough rotting," he said, hoarsely. "You're some girl." He paused, but his look finished his sentence, and I released myself. As I walked away he called out: "Hi! don't go away like that. I apologize. I'll never do it again till next time."

I went into the house. I wasn't very offended, for, after all, a man has a right to approach a woman. How else is he to find out whether she likes him? But there was about

Padbury something so dissipated; he looked such a drunken rake, and I'd heard stories about him from Gaby. Something about a wife whose money he'd run through. It seemed that he had courted an old maid, a Miss Bulmer, a good match, since her brother, Lord Bulmer, was getting richer and richer, then threw her over to marry a rich American. So I sat down in the drawing-room, hoping Mr. Brough would drift in. But he did not. The house seemed empty. Lord Alfred had gone out in the car with Gaby, Mr. Sheridan, and the Benthams. Julian was hiding somewhere with "Dick." I was perhaps too worn, perhaps too full of a new interest, to care much about that. So I sat down, read the illustrated papers, and smoked. An hour passed. The house was very silent, except that now and then one heard a housemaid, pursued by a footman, giggle in this bachelor home of anarchy. Nothing happened; the sun fell softer and softer as the afternoon wore on. It was too bad to stay indoors, with half the winter yet to come, and to lose this Elysian day. I looked out; there was nobody on the terraces. No doubt Mr. Padbury had gone to Walmer to pick up somebody in the parade. Oh, well, I could get rid of him if he worried me.

I went out again. Indeed, the terraces were deserted, and I walked right down the garden, almost to the foreshore. I felt inclined to explore. On the right, running down almost to the sea, was a little wood of fir trees, casting the black shadow of their everlasting leaves. It looked a fairy wood. I went in. It smelled moist and earthy. As it was a little wood, I thought I would go down to the sea over the spongy carpet of fallen needles. Just as I reached the middle I started. I had not expected what I saw—Mr. Padbury, established in a hollow, huddled up in overcoat and muffler, smoking a cigar, and reading *The Winning Post*. He looked up.

"Hullo! Were you looking for me?" This impertinence silenced me, so he had time to go on. "I say, Little Bear, it was nice of you to come after me." He stood up, came toward me, and, as he put out a hand, I stepped back.

"Don't touch me."

"Dear me! Have you changed your mind so soon, darling?"

I saw that he was working his way between me and the house, but I couldn't very well rush past him; I should have been ridiculous. But I did edge toward the garden, and thus we came still closer together.

"Let's be friends," he said. "You're too sweet for words. Come and sit in that little hole. It's beautifully downy."

"No, thank you."

"What were you doing here, then? Looking for a little place for yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, where there's room for one there's room for two when they like one another." With shocking speed he seized my hand and tried to draw me into his arms. I said nothing, but thrust him away and ran. I ran down the slope, but at once I heard his footsteps behind me. We were dodging between the trunks. How long it seemed, this little way to the sea. I was terrified. I think I lost my direction, or he headed me off, for just as I caught a glimpse of the sea I found that he stood between me and the open. I stopped. Suddenly we found ourselves one on each side of a tree, jumping from side to side, he pursuing me. "Come on," he said, "don't be silly. I won't eat you." He grabbed at me, missed. "Come on, you silly kid. You know you want to be caught."

I eluded him again, two or three times. "Don't you overdo the coyness, or I'll go home." This must have put me off my guard, for he feinted, pretended to lunge to the right, and, coming round the tree on the left, seized me round the waist. That contact infuriated me. I hate being touched by somebody I don't like, and for some moments we fought, I with my hands against his shoulders, keeping his head away. Over his shoulder I could see the blue water, the safety of the open. If only I could get there. A public path ran there. I thought of all this as we struggled. But he was much too strong for me, and too practiced. I felt my arms bend. His

face came nearer and nearer, rather red, and full of hatred rather than desire. This happened so slowly that I was terrified. A sharp cry came from me, "Help!" At once I grew weaker. One does when one cries for help instead of trusting to oneself. Still blindly making for the sea, I dragged him nearly to the edge of the wood; but his face came nearer, I felt his breath. Again I cried for help. I knew that to this man neither violence nor deceit was foreign. Then he kissed me, upon my bended neck, while in a weaker voice I cried out for help. But as he kissed me I heard from beyond the curtain of trees a little sharp sound. Then another. Miraculously I found myself free, trembling, with Padbury staring toward the sea. Then again, both, we heard the sound, and saw the light of a match in the darkness. I think we ran both together, Padbury toward the house and I toward the sea. Upon the path, looking toward the wood with an air of great indifference, stood Mr. Brough, who seemed to be lighting his pipe. I could hardly speak when I reached him, but he did not seem to notice my embarrassment.

"Hullo?" he said. "Visiting the estate?"

"Yes," I said, panting.

"Like to go along the path? It's a short cut to Walmer."

I went with him. How lucky it was that he happened to be there, and that the striking of the matches frightened my aggressor. Then, and only a few minutes later did I realize what that meant, Mr. Brough put his pipe into his pocket. It was empty. I remained silent for some time as I pieced the drama together. He must have seen us, heard us. Instead of rushing into the wood with a cry of, "Unhand that woman!" he had kept cool, had so arranged things as to rescue me without forcing me to know that he knew of my unpleasant adventure; he had saved me from feeling obligation to him. I couldn't bear that. I had to say something. So I said, "I'm so glad you came by."

He glanced at me, half annoyed. "How do you mean?"

"Why did you strike those matches?"

"To light my pipe."

"It was empty."

"Oh, a man often chews an empty pipe, don't you know?" he replied, irritably.

I smiled. "Well, I won't press it, since you don't want me to, but thank you very much."

Then he surprised me. "Damn! Damn! Damn!" he remarked, as if to himself.

"What's the matter?"

"Really, this is too bad. Just because I happen to be passing by a wood, and happen to strike a few matches, and you come out, you've got to thank me. Of course the fellow's a cad. I suppose I can't punch his head when we get back. It 'd only advertise you."

I said nothing. I liked his tact. He saw the situation from my point of view and never from that of the romantic hero. Indeed, he only said one revealing thing.

"I wish it hadn't happened. I don't want you to feel obliged to me, because . . . because when women are grateful to one for some trifle, and if one likes them at all, then they . . . they . . . Oh, damn, let's go into Walmer. They've got a terrific film on there, 'The Woman Who Lived Two Lives.' Let's go and be shocked by her other life."

I fell into his mood and we walked on. But his rough sensitiveness shook me. He seemed to guess my feelings and my problems without questioning me, but, always with that air of a shying horse, he plunged into commonplaces when he revealed anything of himself or when he thought that I was going to express too much. At last I realized that in him discretion conflicted with desire. We had known each other only four days, and never before in four days had I become so sure of anybody. He was—how shall I put it?—real. So we talked a good deal, though we never got to the picture palace; it was too late. He stated a few general ideas. They were very masculine ideas, and we nearly quarreled over a divorce case where a man had shot his wife's lover, and whose murder was converted into manslaughter, as a result of which a nominal sentence was imposed and the murderer was released. I thought this right, but Alec

Brough thought the verdict wrong, though the accused should have been set free all the same.

"I can't make you out," I said. "You want to do a thing you think wrong."

He twinkled at me. "Yes. And you, being a woman, don't want to do a thing that's wrong; you prefer to do the wrong thing and call it right."

"Oh, you men!" I said. "You're always splitting hairs. You're all lawyers at heart."

"Maybe. We like to think straight, even when we act crooked. In this case I say the man ought to have been sentenced to death, and then given a free pardon. Like that justice would have been done."

"Oh, justice!" I said. "If there's a thing that makes me tired in men it's their idea of justice. What's the good of justice? A nasty, rigid thing that says, 'This is wrong, and you must be punished, and we can't help your motives,' or, 'This is right, and you shall have the O. B. E., and we can't be bothered about the dirty tricks you used in getting it.' Justice! It's like a penny-in-the-slot machine."

"I know," said Mr. Brough. "Women hate justice, don't they? You like what you call mercy, or generosity—in other words, sloppy sentiment—hang the victim and crown the murderer. There was a musical comedy once, called 'Upsidonia,' short, I suppose, for Upsidedownland. I should say that good women go to Upsidonia when they die."

"I see you despise women, like all men," I remarked, trying to look mutinous.

"No, we don't despise women, only they're different. I suppose so, at least. I know very little about them."

"Really?" I said. I'd heard that remark before; it is a popular opening.

"Really. I've been too busy."

"Too busy to notice *us*?"

"Yes, too busy. But there comes a time when one knows a bit about life, and then one finds out that it isn't what one thought it was. Most of the time I've thought life was bricks and mortar, but I've changed my mind."

"How?" I couldn't help asking that. After a moment's hesitation he said:

"I've changed my mind lately. There are other things than bricks and mortar, and one can't always get at them." He threw me a quick glance, looked away, and, again hesitating, added: "Ships that pass in the night, you know. It's very nice while the lights shine. One remembers it. It's better than nothing."

I did not reply, and we went back rather silent. I didn't want to understand him entirely. I was afraid of understanding him, because I didn't know what I'd do if I succeeded. It was inconceivable that a man should matter to me after four days. And I belonged to Julian; in spite of all his baseness I was Julian's. I loved Julian. I must love Julian.

Chapter IV

Ways to Freedom

I

WE left Notley on the Friday morning. I see myself again, alone with Julian in the railway carriage that crawls toward Dover. We are silent, both of us, he behind the *Daily Mail*, I behind the *Daily Mirror*. We look very nice, so established. I wear a charming coat and skirt of brown tweed threaded with green; a violet silk muffler lies by my side. Julian is delicious in dark blue. His hands are neat, his brown boots shine. We look like a comfortably situated young couple that have been married just long enough to sit alone in a railway compartment and read their papers all the same.

But that is not why we both engross ourselves, why we are together and apart. We are preserving the decencies of an indecent situation. We do not love each other any more. We have been like that for a long time, but we didn't know it; now we do. But we go along together because, well, there it is, one can't fly apart like that, even when the bond has gone. We are like the water and the glass which the Japanese acrobat whirls in the air without spilling a drop. We are apart as that water and that glass, but the swing keeps us together. When the force that caught us up ceases to whirl us round at once that glass will be empty.

As I turn over the pages, and even manage to smile a little over Haselden, who, using the recent Labor victories, shows me the day of a Labor member's wife, trying to cope with social success, I note a rumor the spring fashion will give us rather fuller skirts. I thought as much. Pictures of women, society leaders, actresses, and, hullo! Monica and her first

baby. Then I come across a picture of a dancer with an upright wig. Suddenly I put the paper down, look at Julian, who does not notice me, and turn away. She is rather like "Dick," that dancing girl. They're all alike, that sort, turned out of a mold, of the same stock, by Desire out of Cupidity. I see again what I saw last night. I have lost my way on the first floor along these many corridors. Once before, I have floundered into Lord Alfred's room and found him asleep on his bed, clad only in shirt and trousers, pink as a baby. This time, as I turn a corner and hesitate, I see a man with golden hair stand at an open door. He seems to plead. I hear a laugh, a pretty laugh, a whisper, "No, you mustn't." Still he seems to plead. How can she repel him? Do I not know the softness of that blue gaze? Yet she does. But as she repels she invites. The red-crowned head peers from the doorway, and before she closes the door lightly kisses the lips that mutely appeal.

He saw me three or four seconds after he had passed "Dick's" door, so did not know whether I had seen him or not. He was jaunty. "Hullo, Little Bear! What you doing here? Lost, like me, I suppose. I never can find my way in this barn."

"Yes," I reply, "I was lost. Where's our room?"

Nothing more was said. I remembered the day when I found him in Sadie's flat. Now I am calm. I'm used to it. And I turn over the pages of the *Daily Mirror*, seeking some interest that awhile shall flicker before my eyes and with its rushlight dispel the darkness of my mood.

II

When I got home, when I saw about me the familiar things, once friends, now acquaintances rejoicing over my troubles, I decided to leave Julian. It is significant of the depth of my resolution that this time there was no theatrical row, no announcement of my intentions. I didn't pack, I didn't make fantastic plans. I merely decided that as soon as I was ready I would go. I was perfectly nice to Julian, went

out to dinner with him, talked amiably to Arf a Mo', and, when we came back, did not refuse Julian the good-night kiss. Why should I? It didn't matter to me much whether he kissed me or not. I didn't hate him; to hate him I should have had to love him still. Also, I slept very well. Why not? I did not worry over him.

Next morning I made my plans. On paper. One thinks best on paper. I was going to cut clear from all this, give up the tinsel life. I had no illusions about the life of the workinggirl; I mean, I didn't invest it with any dignity, for I knew that being a workinggirl means cooking sausages on one's fire. But, anyhow, one wasn't deceived, one wasn't ridiculous before one's acquaintances. The first thing to do was to get clear. I wasn't going to leave any ends sticking out. I would keep my clothes, for they had been given to me, and I didn't suppose that Julian would dress his new girl in my old clothes. No! I must be just; he hadn't done that to me. But I'd not take his money, and I'd not even be beholden to Lord Alfred. He was the best of men, but I owed him twenty-two pounds. That must be paid back. Naturally my first desire was to get employment, and I was one of the fortunate people who could choose between two jobs: manicure or shorthand typing. I chose manicure. Not because it was better paid, for I never made more than two to three pounds in a week, but one got extras that a shorthand typist could not hope for—free dinners, free pleasures, and a sort of excitement. Which shows that Ursula Quin was not the same woman as Ursula Trent. She'd hardened. She was fitter for the world; she was inclined to take what she could get, and to abate a little of her dignity in so doing. She was no longer a diamond, but she had acquired some of its hardness.

I had no luck. I first went to the manicure shop where I had had my nails done for fifteen months, where madame was always all over me, pumping me to get hold of Julian's ideas for a frock, or wondering whether I had any theater tickets to spare, I who got so many from my amusing friends. I was rather surprised to find madame rather different when I

asked her whether she wanted a new hand. I tried to carry it off by pointing out that my husband was away all day, and that, as I had no children, I had nothing to do, but madame grew more and more suspicious.

"I didn't know you'd been a manicurist, Mrs. Quin. Fancy that! When I see you such a fine lady, well, I'd never have thought it."

"It isn't sinking so low, is it?"

"No, of course not," said madame, remembering that she was taking the wrong line from her point of view.

"Well, will you take me on?"

She raised desperate arms. "But we have no room! We could not squeeze in one more young lady."

"The gentlemen wouldn't mind squeezing, would they?" said Ursula Quin.

Madame grew rather stiff. "Mine is not that kind of shop."

"I apologize," said Ursula Trent.

Madame wouldn't have me. She hinted that I would turn the other girls' heads by my grand way of living. I would get them into bad ways, and she wanted to keep her house respectable. I gathered indirectly that, after trying both methods, madame found respectability paid better!

It took me some time to make up my mind to go into the real labor market. I was still myself. I could still imagine myself a manicurist with the assistance of madame, but I couldn't easily find a post without assistance. All January passed like that, and it was not until February that I made further efforts. I think that was due to Julian's attitude. Not a word had been said about "Dick," but he was sensitive enough to know that there was something wrong and to connect it with our stay at Notley. His conscience pointed to "Dick." We did not discuss "Dick," and indeed lived our ordinary lives, dining out and meeting the same people, talking of business and of new clients. I behaved exactly like a wife, and did not even repel his caresses. But they grew less and less frequent, and it is evidence of my new detachment that I did not much care. I supposed that he was

running "Dick" somewhere, but I couldn't be bothered. Now and then I wondered why he stuck to me. I have never quite sorted that out, but I believe there was a double reason. One was that he liked me, all right, and that he wanted a woman to live in his flat. I did very well; probably he wasn't sure that "Dick" or another would do as well. He liked my way of speaking, dressing, behaving with his friends. His wardrobe and I did very well and he kept us. The second reason was probably that he had experience of my rages, and that he was afraid to turn me out. He didn't know how to do it. I can see no other reason, but there may be many. Nothing is so complex as a man, nothing so deceptive; women do know what they want, but a man generally varnishes all that over with "good form," "decency," or "what is right and proper." I don't believe there's a convict in Dartmoor who has not the thickest moral illusions. The women in Holloway Gaol must be very different.

I remembered what Susie and Mabel had told me: "If you want a job go round and knock at doors." I often knocked in February. I went to well over a dozen manicure shops, but I didn't get taken on. One very fast place told me I looked too ladylike for their kind of trade. Two of the respectable places insisted on a reference, and I was too shy, too conscious of my past, to refer them to Denman Street. The other places were overcrowded. One woman said to me: "Years ago every girl wanted to go on the stage. A good many of them still do, and there are those who want to go on the film. But there are some who are too stupid for the stage and the film, though you mightn't believe it, and they go manicuring. I should say that over a hundred of the girls who didn't win a prize in that thing of the *Daily Mail's*, 'The Golden Apple,' have come along here."

Most of the shops turned me down without listening to me. There was a crisis in the manicure world just then, because the demobed officers had spent their gratuities. Manicuring was suffering, together with the theater and other minor amusements. I thought I would stick to it, that I would knock at every door, and I even went so far as to enter

a little barber's shop in Camden Town to suggest that they should start manicuring. (Very enterprising of me.) But when I saw the Balkanic attendants, the greasy marble, when they stared at me, the three of them, with their black eyes set in cheeks that looked like lard, Ursula Trent overcame Ursula Quin. I pretended to have made a mistake and to have thought that they did waving.

So it accorded well enough with my temperament that at last I gave in and went to Satterthwaite to ask if he could find me a job of some sort. We ladies, we're so damned soft. He seemed very surprised.

"But what do you want a job for?" he asked.

"Well, I haven't much to do. Julian's out all day and I've got no children."

"No," said Satterthwaite, sympathetically, "it must have been a great grief to you, Little Bear, to lose your little one." He mourned for a while; the dear old man, like all of his race, adored children. Esther was very satisfactory now. She had begun with twins, and this seemed to have cured her of the last vestige of socialism. But he returned to my affairs.

"Aren't you happy, Little Bear? I don't want to ask you questions if you don't want to answer, but as I listen to you I say to myself: 'Little Bear's got everything in the world. What she want to go to work all day for two quid a week?' I say to myself, 'There's something wrong.'"

"Yes, there is. I wonder whether you'd be very, very nice to me."

"Anything in the world," and the podgy hands were spread out in confirmation.

"Well, don't ask me any questions."

He promised, and he tried very hard to ask no questions. He began by discussing whether I'd do for the film, but he feared my features would be too small. He tried to make me laugh by asking me how I'd like to make up bright yellow? And between these remarks he interposed: "I say it's a shame that Quin shouldn't make you happy. But, ah! he did me a good turn, and, anyhow, I mustn't talk about that." Or

again: "I do think it's a shame you have to work. You ought to be kept in a conservatory with the orchids. Ah! It does make me angry to think he's not acting proper to you. But don't mind me; I don't want to ask questions."

I had to laugh at him, and at last to tell him a little. Satterthwaite was in great difficulties, because he wanted to sympathize with me, yet did not want to run down the man who had helped him. That, perhaps, eventually stopped his questions. "Well," he said, "I'll see what I can do. We might try you for the film, though I'm not very hopeful. I'll speak to Lockwood. You wouldn't mind walking on, would you?"

"Oh no. Anything. I only want to make a little money. Then I could get away."

"Oh," said Satterthwaite, "you want to go away, right away from here!" He looked so sorrowful that I smiled.

"I don't mean go away from London. Only away from Julian. You see, he and I . . . oh, there's no harm in telling you. We're not married."

"I know."

"Do you? It was nice of you not to say so. And I can't stay with him any more. You can guess why."

"That's bad."

"If only I could make three pounds a week, or even two pounds ten."

He was silent for a moment, his brown eyes very soft upon me. He seemed to be making an effort, for he got very hot and fanned himself with one of the khaki handkerchiefs he had left over from the war, when he was a major in charge of camp theaters. Then, with a gulp, "Mrs. Quin . . . I mean, Little Bear—do you ever think about getting married?"

"Of course I do. Every girl does, I suppose."

"Ah! but you took the wrong turning. No! I don't mean that. Anyhow, what is bygones is bygones. Do you feel like it, supposing Mr. Right came along?"

I grew embarrassed and tried to get up, but he detained me.

"Look here, Little Bear," he said, "why don't you marry

me?" I was just going to snub him when, with sudden softness, he added: "I fell in love with you that day, more than a year ago, when Quin brought you up to see me here. And I've been thinking of you all the time since."

"It was very kind of you, but . . ."

"Oh, I know I haven't got the looks of Douglas Fairbanks. More like poor old Pimple, but I've got a good heart. Got a lot of money too, just now." He saw that I was stung. "I know that don't matter to you, Little Bear, you're not that sort. But one's got to have money. Can't be helped. And my children are all grown up, so you'll have no worry."

For a moment I hesitated. It seems extraordinary, for Satterthwaite was almost too common for our set, but he was so entirely honest, and he moved me. He must have felt that, for he pressed his advantage.

"I know you can't be in love with me. It's too late. Nobody was in love with me since my poor Rebecca. But I'll do anything you want. Just get married and ask nothing more. You'll have your flat; I have my house. Sometimes you come and have tea with me." His voice grew husky, "Just to make you happy."

I couldn't say "yes." It would have been . . . ridiculous, but I was very fond of him, and so I promised that, though I couldn't marry him, sometimes I'd come and have tea with him all the same.

III

Nothing happened for a time. Julian must have known that I was looking for work, for Satterthwaite couldn't keep his tongue still; little by little the news must have reached Julian. I suppose he didn't care. Besides, now he went out alone almost every night, and sometimes came back very late, without even saying that he'd been to a business dinner. So I went again to see Satterthwaite, who so far could not find me a job. Things had been frightful in the theatrical world; plays had come down in bunches; rents had crashed. Now the times were getting worse. Everybody was cautious, and there were few expensive productions, therefore poor

opportunities for show girls. But he was still looking out. I suppose I could have increased my chances by talking to Lockwood or to Karl Meerbrook, but I couldn't bear it. I'd have to tell my story to people who knew it. They'd insist on having it out of me, just to see me squirm. So, instead, I relied only on Satterthwaite, and began a habit of taking tea at his office every Wednesday. This could hardly be misunderstood.

One Wednesday, as I left a little early, because Satterthwaite had an appointment, I found that the staircase was temporarily blocked up by two cases. They were being brought up by perspiring workmen, worried by a hoarse foreman, behind whom stood, in a black coat spattered with dust and dirt, a familiar figure—it was Alec Brough. For a moment I wondered what he was doing there, then remembered that Lord Alfred had engaged him because he was Satterthwaite's architect. I remembered, too, that the old man was delighted with the alterations that were being made in the next house, which he was going to combine with his picture house.

We stared at each other for a moment across the struggle on the stairs, smiling recognition. It was several minutes before the cases got past my landing, and so I had time to review my impressions.

It was queer, looking across like that at some one so familiar, not being able to talk to him, and thus compelled to enter the recesses of one's personality while presumably he did the same. I had time to remember nearly everything that had passed between us, to analyze my feelings, time enough to tie myself up completely between the emotion of gladness and that of disturbance. As I watched him, still behind the obstruction, unimpatient and very dirty, I asked myself whether I liked him much or very much. I wouldn't own up to myself that I was excited rather than glad.

At last the cases were heaved past me. Brough had followed them step by step, and the first thing he said was characteristic of him. As he shook hands he looked down at the steps where the cases had done some damage, and

remarked: "Architecture's a fine trade. While it's finishing one job it creates another. I'm afraid, though, the builder will repair this on his own. Since I'm interfering with the builder, I ought to have seen to it that we brought the whole house down." Then, with a sudden change of mood: "How are you, Mrs. Quin? I've not seen you for a long time."

"No. Three months, isn't it?"

"Yes, since Notley. Well, how's life?"

"Oh, life! A set of samples, don't you think?"

"Quite so. But some are good." As I did not reply, he went on: "Life's all right when one's got something to do or somebody one's fond of. The latter's the bigger job." Again his mood changed as he looked at his wrist watch. "Five o'clock. What about tea?"

I hesitated. I realized that to say "yes" would be significant, though I might safely have said "yes" to a dozen acquaintances. So I said, "Yes," and rather excitedly waited for two or three minutes while he ran upstairs to wash, and brush his coat.

We went into a small, underground teashop that called itself, I think, "The Wigwam" and was got up with painted canvas, spears, feathered headdresses. Inside each cubicle were hung up horribly realistic scalps. "You know what they're for?" said Alec Brough. "They enable the young fellows who come here to tell the girls that they can have their own."

I laughed, but he embarrassed me. So square and good-humored, so pleasing, in a way, with his incredibly close-clipped hair and mustache; he was got up like a solid man of business, and yet I found him artistic, philosophic. So different from people like Meerbrook and Arf a Mo', who certainly were clever, but carried all their cleverness on the surface. Alec Brough was almost artificially simple. The others were rather like Asprey's windows—Brough was like the Bank of England. He made such an impression on me, that, instead of slipping into easy acquaintanceship, I plunged . . . no, I didn't plunge, I fell from thousands of

feet into an abyss of intimacy. Like a flapper just out of Wycdean, I blurted:

"Mr. Satterthwaite asked me to marry him."

"Oh," he replied, without any sign of surprise. "Going to have him?"

"How can you be so absurd? Why, he's fifty!"

"Yes. He's fifty and not pretty," said Brough. Then, with a judicial air that infuriated me: "But he's a good chap. I've had to do with him for two years, and he's straight. You might do better. You might do worse."

I was very annoyed. He wanted to tuck me up. He was sorry for me and wanted to save me from a cruel world. I felt like a Christian found unfit for the lions. I said so with some heat.

"Oh," he replied, on his defense, "have it as you like. I don't want you to marry him. I'd rather . . ." He stopped and I blushed. But his tact carried him on. "You see, the world's a difficult place for a pretty woman. Looks have their value, but only one sort of value. Looks are a wasting asset."

"What's a wasting asset?"

"An asset that goes down in value year by year as you use it. Like a mine, or a car. You can put up a sinking fund to redeem the cost of your car, or the value of your mine, but there's no sinking fund that will get you back the velvet of your cheek, the olive marble of your neck, or the sleepy topaz of your eyes."

After a moment I said: "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know what you mean by redeeming, nor by a sinking fund, but men always talk like that. They like to say things we don't understand, because they like to think us silly. We don't mind." I discovered with surprise that I was flirting with him.

As he remarked half to himself, "Poor old Satterthwaite! he's absurd," it suddenly struck me that I'd blurted out this proposal to a man who was supposed to think me married to Julian. I, always on my guard, had done this! What could he be thinking? I'd given myself away, and I didn't dare

to inquire what he thought. My immediate impulse was to drop the subject, and to ask him, as we ate the deceptive postwar chocolates, which are all hard nougat inside and only filmed with sweet softness, to explain how he was extending the picture house; how an ordinary dwelling could be worked in? He took my bait, and for a while the conversation stayed safe. Alec Brough extended his girders, underpinned the basement, and inserted concrete floors. But he must have realized that he was being played, for he, too, bolted from his subject and said:

"I mustn't talk shop. How is it you came to consider marrying Satterthwaite?"

Oh dear, oh dear, he'd got it all. Well, I must face it. "I don't know."

"How do you mean, you don't know? He wouldn't have proposed to you if he didn't think he could marry you."

Shame and misery were too much for me. I was being exposed; we sea anemones of the home counties, we hate being exposed. We get under stones before the tide goes down. I wanted to tell him to mind his own business, and instead I began to cry. He let me alone, but suddenly it occurred to me that he must be getting used to see me cry. So I stopped and smiled moistly. Then he leaned across to me, so near that I could see the various colors in his eyes. He looked strong and protective—more like a rock than a sea anemone.

"Don't cry . . . Ursula. I let you cry the other time because it did you good. To-day you're only being self-indulgent."

"Perhaps I am."

"Then you've had enough debauchery for one day, don't you think? Why not be open to me? Don't you like me?"

"I suppose I do."

"Well, then! Tell me what's the matter. Supposing I understand, won't it be better for you to tell me yourself?"

I did not reply. He was subtle, in a way. If I told him, then I need not know that the talk of the town had carried my affairs to his ears. So, in a few hurried words, feeling

red and hot about the ears, I told him that I was living with Julian, that I wasn't happy, that I wanted to leave him, and must find something to do. He meant to be kind, but he was brutal, as men are, just out of clumsiness.

"What use are you? Women aren't educated. Can you draw?"

"No."

"Pity. So you can't be a draftsman in my office. What about the stage? What can you do? Dance?"

"Only the usual sort."

"No good. Sing?"

"No."

"Acted a bit?"

"Yes, in private theatricals. I didn't do very well."

"Well, what *can* you do, then?"

"I . . ." No, I wasn't going to tell him I'd been a manicurist. "I was a nurse during the war."

"There are forty thousand of you looking for jobs."

"I can do typing and shorthand," I said, aggressively.

"That's better. How long is it since you did any?"

"Two years."

"You must be pretty rotten by now. But you might pick it up again."

He humiliated me horribly. He was making clear what I knew already, that a woman can scratch up a living but not a future, and that the only job she is really fit for is to be a man's keep, legal or illegal, permanent or temporary. Still, he meant to be kind. After a while we went out, and, as we happened to turn to the left, I followed him up Charing Cross Road, and through filthy little streets off Tottenham Court Road, where they sold iron, oranges, and blue foreign meat, until finally we reached the broad spaces of Regent's Park. They weren't really broad spaces, for by now it was half past six and the gates were closed. So we walked round and round the Inner Circle, not a romantic promenade. He talked of a good many things and we came to some sort of intimacy. I understood him better now. He was entirely devoted to his work, and wanted to create a new architec-

tural style. He had spoken of this at Walmer, and now told me his ideas all over again, which showed how persistent they were. He seemed to think that the pursuit of art was an affair so exacting that it left little time for anything else. And architecture was an art. I came upon some secret irritations.

"I know what you think," he said, gruffly. "You're like the rest. You think we architects, we're a lot of builders. Putting a brick on the top of another, and a bit of slate on the top, and there's a house. You think we need no ideas, no sense of beauty, that we just make your beastly dormitories, and the beastly town halls where your rate collectors live." He stopped, for the first time since I knew him, made a gesture toward Bedford College that I thought unoffending. "That! I hope it 'll burn down. It would be lovely to see the Houses of Parliament and their bastard nineteenth-century Gothic in flames, and to see the flames trickling all over the Elizabethan villas of the suburbs, and Mr. Willett's George IV erections, built last week. I wish the lightning 'd come down and destroy every building, picture, piece of sculpture, toby jug, that was made before the war. If I were king, whenever an artist died, I'd have his work burned in Trafalgar Square. The dead are stifling the living. Painters, architects, all of us, we're poisoned by the stinking fumes that come out of the corpses of Raphael and Rembrandt. I'd like to empty the tripe shop of art of all the tripe that is called Romney, and Constable, and Whistler, and Turner, and all that bilge."

"Surely you don't call Turner bilge!"

"No, of course I don't. What I mean is that so long as the public go on crawling before the old arts, so long will we have no chance for the arts of to-day. In Botticelli's time people didn't swarm over Cimbue and Giotto. Nowadays you call no man an artist until he is dead. You make me sick."

"I say," I remarked, "what have *I* done?"

He looked at me more amiably. "Oh, nothing, but you're like the rest, I suppose. A lot of art murderers. If we build

a church to-day, we've got to build it in the fifteenth-century style. The Methodists are running up Gothic in galvanized-iron sheeting. I'd galvanize them—with a bomb. Copy, copy, always copy! Selfridge in decadent Greco-Roman, Warings in intoxicated English Renaissance, Burberry's is better—there's less of it. A man asked me, the other day, to build him a house in Sussex. It's to be Tudor. My God! Tudor! I asked whether he'd have a Tudor umbrella stand in the hall. He said it wasn't a bad idea, and what did I think of having it made of? Porcelain or stone?"

I laughed. He shocked me, because I felt the reverence of my class for Raphael, and Romney, and all the pictures in the museums that we never go to see, except at the age of fifteen, when we are run round by force by a schoolmistress. And I felt superstitious reverence for old buildings, with their draughts, the little windows that let in no air, and their sanitation as Elizabethan as their outside. But, perhaps because he moved me, I did understand that the worship of the old arts deprives the new arts of their chance.

"I'm a futurist," he declared, violently. "A futurist without a future."

I comforted him. I didn't like to think he hadn't got a future. Also I was stirred by the fact that for the first time he had made a speech to me. A woman would have made that speech long ago. Suddenly he dropped the arts and his excitement subsided. "Look here," he said, "I've been thinking. It seems to me the best thing you can do is to do some typing to get you into it again. I've written a book." He gulped. "I don't mean that. I've just slapped some ideas together. I'm going to call it *An English Architecture: Why Not?* I'm thinking of giving it a preface entitled 'About Damn Fools and Others. (If There Are Any.)' Perhaps they won't print the preface, but would you like to type the stuff?"

"I'd love to, but I haven't got a machine. I suppose I could get the money."

"Yes! 'the twelve-pound look.' Sorry, nowadays it's more like the fifty-pound look. But there's a machine in my office.

Beyond the fact that the tension's out of order, and that the ratchet is so worn that the roller slips a line when it fancies, it isn't bad. Suppose I lend it you."

I remained thoughtful. Certainly this was the thing to do, to practice a little. And I could go back to sermons and lectures to get up my shorthand. But how would Julian take my typing? One couldn't hide a typewriter in one's dressing case. Also the subject matter would immediately bring up his memories of Alec Brough. It is significant of my state of mind that, without analyzing too much, I didn't want Julian to talk of Mr. Brough.

"No," I said, "I don't think that would quite do. You see, at Dover Street I've got so little room."

"I didn't mean that. Come and do the stuff at my office. Nice and quiet. There's only the draftsman and a decayed person who failed as a quantity surveyor, but he's handy. And the office boy."

The idea of going to his office was pleasing. So business-like. "All right," I said. "Mornings would be best."

"Whenever you like. I'm not in a hurry, since the book won't be published at all. There's about sixty thousand words of it, I should say. Some of it on old envelopes; the best parts on bits of newspaper. Just ideas, you know. You may be able to read some of it. I want three copies. I'll give you . . . one and ninepence a thousand."

"Oh, that's too much. Agencies 'll . . ."

"Nonsense! Besides, you'll supply your own paper and carbons." We made terms. I did not allow myself to be pleased with anything except with the idea that I would earn five or six pounds while I recovered my old craft.

IV

It took me rather a long time to transcribe Mr. Brough's MS. It was frightful stuff. Not only was some of it incoherent with rage, not only did it abound with savage references to Sir William Richmond, with lengthy assaults

on Professor Lethaby, but there were incomprehensible passages about Aston Webbs that let them grow between their fingers. As for Sir Ernest George, I do not yet know how the animosity arose. I told the author that, if the book was published, he would probably have to pay thousands of pounds in damages for libel, but he merely replied that it would be worth it. Anyhow, the technical words were frightful; the writing began well, but grew inspired with passion toward the middle of the page. I never did more than two thousand words in a morning.

I was a little nervous at first. The draftsman clearly looked upon me as a danger, because he did the small amount of typing that we required. The decayed quantity surveyor was easier, because an unhappy life had trained him to having horror accumulated upon horror's head. Bert, the office boy, began familiar, and related his love affairs, located near St. Pancras, until I informed him that small boys sometimes had their heads smacked. I was so much larger than he that he took this seriously; he then became my friend, renewed my blotting paper before I needed it, and even put in a ribbon for me. More than that man cannot do for woman.

I had rather nervously anticipated that Mr. Brough would be a good deal in the office. It would be nice. It would be rather exciting. But, no; during the first week he came in once, asked me how I was getting on, walked out after telling me to count up the words at the end of the week and leave a note on his desk. I did this, and on the Tuesday found in an envelope a postal order for seventeen and six. Next day, however, I was shifted into a small room which contained many rolls of paper and plans and great masses of dirt. Alec Brough came in and told me that I'd been shifted out because the noise of the typewriter disturbed the old quantity surveyor.

"He's had a hard life, you see, and his nerves aren't as good as they were." He sat down upon a packing case. He looked very nice. Funny! I didn't mind his being in gray tweeds as much as I used to. They were rather nice tweeds. Julian generally wore blue. Well, gray suited some

people. I thought no more of it, for he stayed and talked with me for half an hour. I was less shy now, and told him more clearly the causes of my trouble. He listened to the end while I hinted at Julian's infidelities, but he was tactful enough to say nothing against him. Indeed he half pleaded for him.

"Well, you know, there are lots of men who don't take these things quite as seriously as you do. They may be very fond of a girl and gad about. All the same, mind you, I'm not sticking up for him."

"It sounds very like it. Men always stick up for men."

"To run other men down is an easy way to please a woman who thinks she has cause for complaint against one of them."

"You want me to marry Mr. Satterthwaite," I said, hugging my wrongs.

"No. All I said was I was sorry for old Satterthwaite. And it's so difficult to do anything for him. A man can't comfort another man; we're too gawky. Women help women better than men help men, because they let themselves go, and after they've had a regular dancing-dervish scene they powder their noses and feel better. When men want to cry the hemorrhage is internal."

"I'm very fond of Mr. Satterthwaite, but it's too much."

"I know, I know. The only thing that can help him is love. It's the only thing anybody can give anybody."

I grew grave, and after a little while he went away. I went on like this to the end of May. I took nearly forty mornings to do sixty thousand words. I was bad, and the MS. was worse. Also Alec Brough took to reading the transcribed stuff, and to altering it for retyping in what looked like cipher. As a result we saw more of each other, for he had to read me the parts I couldn't make out. Sometimes he couldn't do it himself, and, now that time has passed, I will confess that as the days went on—mark you, quite unconsciously—I struggled rather less to read his writing. Sometimes he had to bend over the machine to put me right, and once, as I moved, my hair touched his

cheek. I moved away just quickly enough to see that he had grown pale. Oh, it's the eternal office comedy, I know, vulgarized by the picture postcard, but it can be real all the same. Before those weeks were over I was becoming sure of two things—that he mattered to me, and that I mattered to him. How much? In what way? That I didn't know. I know only that I was happier than I'd been for a long time, that the memory of things he said came up in my mind when I was away from the office, that sometimes I went to sleep thinking of him, wondering what he was doing. The emptiness of my relations with Julian had, I think, something to do with it. We were not quarreling, but we were turning into strangers, and held together only by our interests. He paid my way; I was a decoration and a center for him; we had been lovers, and now we might as well have been married. No, I don't mean that, for now . . . but things are so tangled.

One morning, during a silence on the part of Alec Brough, I suddenly wanted him to know something about me. When I remember that revelation I do so no longer as Ursula Trent, but as a wiser young woman, knowing what that meant; that I was in love with him and didn't want to confess it. For lovers always want to tear off their bodies so that the other may see their souls. Apropos of nothing, I said, "My name's not Mrs. Quin."

"I know."

"I know you know, but thank you for not letting on. My name's Ursula Trent. My people live in Hampshire, at a place you've never heard of, called Burleigh Abbas."

"I know. Near Basingalton."

I nearly stopped my confidences. I could tell him if he didn't know, but I couldn't if he did. Fortunately he went on: "I don't know those parts well. As I told you, I generally hunt with the Heythrop, but once or twice I've had a run in your part of the country. The meet is generally at Strathfieldsaye. Go on."

"Well," I said, gulping, "I think you ought to know. My father lives at a place called Ciber Court."

"Oh! And does Mr. Trent know . . . your troubles?"

I hesitated. I didn't want to say "My father's a baronet," but I wanted Alec Brough to know about him. So I grew irrelevant and said: "Yes, in a way. I've been an awful worry, on the top of his having no son. You see, I've only got a sister, and so the title will die out with him."

"Oh! Let me see. Trent? I know the name. I met a fine-looking man once, years ago. I must have lunched with him somewhere in Hampshire. Oh, there must have been forty of us. What was his name? Sir John Trent? No, not John."

"Sir William Trent."

"Oh yes! how silly of me! He wasn't like you."

"No. I take after mamma."

"I suppose you've quarreled with them."

"Yes." I told him a great deal, and he took it all with beautiful naturalness. He had the quality of Doctor Upnor, but there was something sturdier about his mind. He wouldn't run away. I knew a little more about him, too, by now. He was doing pretty well, though he had won only one big competition; but he was specializing on domestic architecture.

"I know," he said, "that people say there's very little in it, but they're wrong. The profiteers all want houses, and it gives one a chance. After all, all the best at Canterbury and Rye and Chester is domestic. Even the court halls and city halls are much smaller than the modern elementary school."

Toward the end we talked less about architecture and more about life, how it could be endured; of love, how it could be pursued. I pieced together that, though he did not pretend to innocence, he had had less to do with women than most men of his age and attractions. He talked in general, and I remember a phrase: "Women? They do provide a certain intellectual stimulus for those who want it. But, on the whole, a man who wants to do big things had better keep skirts out of his eyes. Of course, I speak for myself; I don't need stimulus. Hunt and draw; keep your body hard and your soul soft, that's a pretty fair program."

At the end of May I knew that I was a woman to him, but I could not tell whether I was Woman. I suspected that some sense of fair play prevented him approaching me; he couldn't pursue me so long as I lived with another man. He wasn't Satterthwaite; the kindness of his heart must be restrained by the harshness of his sporting rules. What was I to do? I wasn't the sort of woman to signal. He had been good to me when I was broken and ugly; now he hesitated to love me when I had recovered such beauty as I have. What was I to do? The work was nearly finished. I could take my chance with the world and leave Julian. But I might lose Alec Brough, too, if I once more turned into a workinggirl, too busy by day and too tired at night. I was too old for that: twenty-nine, getting on for thirty. Something I began to confess to myself, that I wholly loved him, that he brought me something which Julian had never given me. Julian had given me an æsthetic intoxication, had taught me that passionate love was a good thing. But he had left my mind to rust. He had made nothing of me. This man was different. He differed from Julian in that I did not crave his caresses. He left me physically neutral, but I wanted him to speak to me, to inflame with interest a mind starving for thought. And I wanted him to love me, so that I might feel justified in loving him.

Chapter V

Grand Parade

I

I DON'T know why I call this chapter "Grand Parade." Perhaps because I am fond of the horse on which I put a shilling, just for fun, through a man whose name I forget. I think I made a pound, or was it fifteen shillings? And this part of my life, that now begins in renewed misery, ends so equably and pleasant, like the broad gallop of a horse that knows how to run.

It was June, London June, that is so much more brilliant than the June of the countryside. There merely the hedges are blossoming bright, and the meadows spangled. Dust rises in the silence and silently settles. But in London, London in June, that is so soft and pale, yes, pale as faded gold brocade, where the sun falls moderate from a vault of powder blue, where in Kensington Gardens the untruthful, gaudy flowers affect that they have grown in the beds where they are set, the dahlias are wearing the clothes of the London season, the men are pleased with their white spats, and the women sun their skins that take on in the heat the tint of the camelia through a veil of white or blue ninon that veils not. One should think of love, just then, for all are beautiful and young; no, perhaps not, for in that light without illusion we must exhibit the corruption of age. That is fitting when one's twenty-nine.

I ought to have been happy, but was not, because then I precisely wanted something that was not refused, yet not offered me. In the first days of that month, Satterthwaite found me a job as shorthand typist in a film renter's office,

where most of the day I transcribed, for fifty shillings a week, burlesque correspondence. Something like this:

DEAR IKE,—How much longer are you going to monkey about? You know quite well that "The Sweetness of Love" is the goods. If you don't get it released to us before the 15th, you'll skip. See?

Yours,

ALF.

They were an extraordinary crowd, East End and West End, where the West had the more Easterly ways. There were Americans too, but they were the best, for they refrained from patting one on the shoulder, and almost apologized for putting a lady to the trouble of taking down. I didn't get all the fun I should have out of the film world; I ought to have laughed at the demand for "good, clean drama, with some punch in it." I ought to have laughed when I saw my chief demanding "the heart touch" in a film that was attractive but cynical. I ought to have rejoiced over the conversations about "big human stories," and the general atmosphere of "vim" and "zip." I did laugh now and then. Indeed, I nearly offended one of the producers who came in to see us, because he complained "that we knew how to hand out the dope." I laughed aloud. I learned a lot of American, and amused my friends by calling them "beauts," and by begging them "to get down to brass tacks." Or telling them a story that "would start them walking."

But I didn't get full value out of this world of wrung heartstrings, broncho-busting, screams in five reels, and drama that would make you "fair get up and yelp." The preoccupation of Alec Brough was growing. It had increased since I saw him less. I am so very much a woman that I can be content, fairly content, if every day I can see the man I care for. We don't ask much of men; we don't ask them to be splendid to us; we want them only to be splendid. Just like that. Monuments, where we may worship. If I'd stayed in his office, typing his epileptic architectural views, I might not have known that I loved him. I knew it at once when I ceased to see him every day. I missed him. I missed

the blunt good-humor, the occasional outbursts of architectural ferocity, and above all the sensation of being welcome. Oh, how we all want to feel welcome! It reassures us. It convinces us that we really exist. One doubts it sometimes. One feels so small, so unimportant; one conceives so easily that if one was run over outside the Ritz, nobody would lose a mouthful. (Of course they wouldn't. I wouldn't lose a mouthful if I was inside the Ritz. It shows how unreasonable one is.) In the first fortnight in June I saw him only twice. Once he took me out to lunch and proved very uninteresting, presumably because he was shy. The second time he called for me at five, as I left the office, and walked with me through Green Park. It is a tribute to him that, when we reached Buckingham Palace, I would not go over the road that leads through Belgravia, ultimately to Battersea Park, to the aviary, where the golden pheasant waited for new lovers. I felt shy of the bird. I wanted no witnesses of my emotional bigamy. But as we came back, the brilliant sunshine reddening the path we trod, we came a little closer to each other. He said, "What are you going to do?"

"How? Do?"

"I mean, are you going on with this work?"

"I don't know," I said. I didn't quite understand him. I had to press him. "You mean, what am I going to do with my life?"

"Yes. Perhaps not all that. Couldn't expect you to know. But what are you going to do next week? That's about as far as one can go."

"Oh," I replied, with an impatient sigh, "how can I tell? Go on, I suppose."

"I suppose so, too, if it makes you happy."

I looked at him angrily. What did he mean? What did he want? If he didn't care for me, why didn't he let me alone? If he did care for me, why didn't he say so? Afraid, perhaps. At last he said something which I didn't understand. It's out of Nietzsche he told me, later. It was this: "To build a sanctuary you must first destroy a sanctuary."

"I don't understand."

"You'll have to before you can run your own life."

Only some months later did Alec explain this simple metaphor. I ought to have known him better. I ought to have understood that he could not imitate Satterthwaite, approach me until I made myself free. What fools we are, we women, when we love! We cease to understand anything. So we parted near Devonshire House. I went home. Julian was dressing for dinner. His shirt band was too tight; he was half strangling himself as he put on his collar. Naturally he looked red. I thought him gross. When a woman's in love, she's unfair to other men. Still, I said nothing. I too performed the dead gestures which carry on the automatic exercise we call life. I dressed as carefully as usual, did my hair. I said, quite naturally, "Will you send the porter for a taxi, or shall I?" We were dining with some people. One may be in love, but one dines all the same.

During the next day or two, Julian seemed to take a malignant pleasure in referring to Alec. I had told him that I'd finished the MS., and he knew that I was working in an office. But he didn't seem to care much, except that he said, "I think it's all rot, this idea of yours, though I suppose a hundred and thirty quid a year 'll come in handy." That evening he was inclined to tease me. As he brushed his dinner jacket he said, "Do you like your new job as well as the other one, Little Bear?"

"What other one?" I asked, with feigned innocence.

"Oh, typing Brough's great thoughts about art. With little intervals, I suppose, for Brough's great thoughts about . . . trifles."

I was annoyed enough to be uncautious. "Are you suggesting that I let him make love to me?"

"No, Little Bear. It's you that's suggesting it."

"What do you mean by trifles?"

"I suppose he'd pass the time of the day with you, wouldn't he? This waistcoat is damned tight; I'm getting stout."

I surveyed him for a moment. No, he wasn't gross, he wasn't stout. Standing so, white to the waist, molded into

his piqué waistcoat, broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, he was still beautiful. But I saw that he was only beautiful, had nothing more than his exquisite body, which even now I could not quite resist. There was nothing else, nothing in that head, nothing in that mind. Only a lovely shell. And as I looked at him, I thought tenderly of the other man, who had not this supple, this feline grace, but in whose occasional sarcasm always lurked a little pity. I clicked my tongue with impatience. What was the use of thinking of that? We must dine.

II

Julian must have perceived that I did not like allusions to Brough, for after flicking me with them two or three times during the next few days, talking of my knight of the foot rule, and advising me to see that the foundations of my happiness were made of stone and not brick, he let the subject alone. I didn't play up to him. I just said nothing, and so he tired of the sport. Indeed, he was in a good temper. He was making a lot of money, for Meerbrook's light opera had at last been staged, and he shared the excitements. Also, I think, he had an affair, for he suddenly affected a more foreign style, longer boots, and an elaborate cane. What was she? Actress? Dancer? Or just a little shop girl picked up in Oxford Street? Russian? Who cared? I didn't care, because Julian didn't matter to me, and I stayed with him, though I loved another man, because he didn't matter to me. That may surprise men, but not women. If I had cared a little for Julian, while loving another, then indeed I could not have borne him, because with my slight fondness would have mixed a remorse that would have humiliated me. As I neither loved nor loathed him, as he just was not, it didn't seem to matter whether I lived with him or not. It was like living alone in a place where occasionally an irrelevant noise made itself heard.

Yet those days were ending. Termination was rushing upon me without my understanding it. Emptiness was the

ground in which any seed might flourish. One Friday afternoon, Julian, being very busy with the matching of some stuff, which he was doing himself because he might change his mind, had not gone to the Maison Dromina. We lunched together in the City, where he in vain interviewed some warehouse men. I wanted to go into Hatchard's while Julian had a man to see at a club near Hyde Park Corner. So we took a taxi, but just as we reached the Circus Julian said: "By Jove! I must have a word with Arf a Mo', if by any chance he's in."

So we stopped the taxi near a big block of flats in Piccadilly. I went on to the bookshop while Julian went upstairs, leaving the taxi outside. I was not long choosing my book, but instead of going home at once I turned into Jermyn Street, to buy soap. I wondered if it was hallucination, but I thought I saw Julian dive up Piccadilly Arcade. Absurd, of course. I bought the soap, but the impression was so strong that I went up Piccadilly Arcade and along Piccadilly until I reached the flats. Funny; the taxi was still there. I recognized the driver by his peculiarly hostile expression.

But then . . . if I'd really seen Julian he couldn't have forgotten the taxi. I felt so oppressed that I went upstairs to Arf a Mo's flat. The valet informed me that Mr. Moy was out of London and would not be back till that evening. Nobody had called. A terrible idea came upon me. In a trembling voice I said to the valet, "Is there more than one way out of these flats?"

"Yes, ma'am, there's a door on to Piccadilly and one on to Jermyn Street."

"Oh! Thanks."

I went down. So it was true. He had bilked the taxi driver, just to save three and six, and was letting the man wait in Piccadilly while he got away into Jermyn Street. It wasn't economy. I knew him too well for that. It was something worse, something cruel that took pleasure in cunning. Well, the first thing to do was to pay the driver, which I did. "My husband finds he'll be upstairs some time," I

said to the impassive driver. I still wanted to cover Julian's shame. It was a little my shame.

III

I didn't say anything about it. Perhaps I still felt too neutral to Julian to let myself in for a scene, where I should have to denounce him, to show myself outraged and humiliated beyond description. Perhaps I was simply too shocked. I'd seen people lie, I'd seen people scheme, but I'd never seen anybody steal. This mood stayed with me next day, and I was spared the society of Julian, for he'd gone away for the week-end, nominally to stay at Lockwood's place in Sussex, on business. I passed that day crushed. Now I had to understand that things were ending, that I must do something, and though I had been much hardened by many years of war work, and nearly three years in the world of peace, so much more terrible than that of war, I was still the Ursula Trent that couldn't make up her mind. Instead I did what my sort tends to do in these cases: I dined at a little Italian restaurant, alone, in Tottenham Court Road, drank a whole bottle of burgundy, followed with a benedictine, and went to bed, feeling that I'd exaggerated the evil of the world. On the Sunday morning I woke up rather early. It was awful. I had a pain as if a large blister were lying across the left side of my face and head. My mouth was coated with bitterness. There was no doubt about it. I had a head. That burgundy must have been made in Tottenham Court Road. Naturally, after failing to eat breakfast, I was very depressed.

Still, I got up. One's heart may break, empires may totter, but one must get up all the same, wash, eat, to sustain the life one doesn't prize. Why does one live? To please the instinct of self-preservation. I ate a little toast and drank as much tea as would fill a kettle. Then I tried to sum up my situation, sitting at the writing table and putting it down under headings, one, two, three. It was obvious that I must leave Julian, but it had been obvious so often. Also I had left him before, and remembered my horrible fortnight

in the Jermyn Street hotel, the sense of dependence on Lord Alfred's money. Also I had had experience of looking for work in a labor market clotted with scores of thousands of girls who wanted to go on earning the pocket money they'd earned during the war. I was frightened of the world. I knew what the stakes were. If I'd been old and ugly, and failed to find work, it would have been the river; for me it was Piccadilly, or, almost as bad, the prodigal return to Ciber Court, with three vague years to be endlessly discussed with mamma. She would begin, "Of course, Ursula, bygones are bygones, but there's just one little thing I'd like to know." Hell!

As usual I had very little money. As usual I didn't know what to do. As usual I was stiff-necked and didn't want to take help from Satterthwaite, or Lord Alfred, or any other kind person. Too incompetent to stand alone and too proud to take money. Yes, I was an English aristocrat right enough. But an English aristocrat, that takes a flunky's tip with difficulty, unless it's very large, say a hundred thousand pounds if he happens to be a general, that aristocrat will always take the flunky's advantage of somebody's patronage. As I got up and went out, intending to go to St. James's Park and think, already I had Alec Brough in mind. It is a tribute to my feeling for him that I hesitated, not because I couldn't take help and advice from him, but because I felt it would bother him, would thrust responsibility upon him. I didn't want him to be responsible for me. Somebody else might do something for me, but to him I must remain an equal. So I sat upon a little green chair in the brilliant sunshine, watching the Sunday families, papa perspiring under a silk hat, mamma in tight shoes, children more fortunate, not so starched as I was when a child, yet their spirits affected by the gloom of the Sabbath. I envied them. They'd got a sort of road to follow, to trot along until they died. I was an adventuress; all the world was mine, and none of it. I think it was this sense of desolation forced me to go to a telephone box and ring up Alec Brough. I had to have some links with the world, and I knew that I needed

his good-humored presence, the brain that understood, the tongue that never committed an indiscretion. He was quite himself on the telephone when I asked whether I might come and see him. He showed no surprise.

"Right-o. When will you come? It's half past twelve. Better come to lunch."

"All right," I said.

"Good-by."

He made things easy. I went up to Hampstead by tube, and lost my way, as one does. At last I found Lower Terrace, where he lived, and for a moment stopped, soothed and made shy by the ancient charm of this place. Lower Terrace consists of only a few cottages, rather precious as well as tumbledown. They are tumbledown in an artistic way, like Marie Antoinette playing dairymaid. They were charmingly named; one of them, Constable Cottage, looked as if it might be the home of a Prunella from Mayfair. Opposite, Romney's cottage, rather nautical, with its white wooden first floor and its outlook toward the rolling northwest.

I took all this in as I hesitated. I stood there, conscious that I looked rather nice in a powder-blue linen coat and skirt, patent shoes, and one of those darling little hats made of varnished plaited straw. I didn't like going in. It made me shy to go into a strange man's house like that; of certain hesitations even extreme experience fails to deprive us. So I stood watching the road that goes toward the Heath, twinkling in the sun as if coated with powdered glass. What could he do? What would he say? It would be so awkward, telling, and so awkward not to tell. Supposing he were alone? Would he make love to me? Perhaps. Did I want him to? Well, yes. But I didn't want him to think I came for that. Oh, damn! Half past one. I'd better go in and be done with it.

I rang the bell hard. The elderly woman who opened was reassuring. This was the cook-housekeeper I had been told about. She led me into the drawing-room on the first floor, where I waited for a moment. A regular man's drawing-room — fishing rods, riding crops, golf clubs, a picture of

Tagalie with her jockey, books, plans, an elevation of a building, and (a curious contrast with the sporting quality) a couple of fine woodcuts labeled Wadsworth. These two, with their bold black and whites, their magnificent energy, fascinated me so that Alec Brough came in without my noticing him.

"Hullo!" he said, as he shook hands. "You're late." He looked at his watch. "We'd better go down, or Mrs. Anslow 'll be mad. She's quite mad enough as it is at having a guest landed on her suddenly."

"I'm so sorry," I mumbled, as we went downstairs.

"Oh, don't you worry. I'll show her I'm a man if she says anything." He giggled. "But I hope she won't say anything. She's really rather fierce and a perfect dear."

We talked of trifles during lunch. What a man's lunch it was. Ox-tail soup! Ox-tail soup at the end of June! Roast beef, baked potatoes, greens cut into cubes . . . and roly-poly. Oh, these barbarians! But as we talked of plays and seaside resorts, the weather, and the speed of the London & Northwestern, I suspected that he was trying to make me drink too much. Evidently he was more sensitive to good wine than to delicate food.

"Try this claret. Good, isn't it? Gives a lot of trouble, though. If you warm it more than three minutes you lose the . . . the . . . what shall I say? . . . soul."

"It's very nice," I said, and emptied my glass.

"I won't give you any more," he went on, "because I want you to try the other one. Mrs. Anslow, the big tumblers, please."

"Do you think I'm going to drink that much?" I said, laughing, as a tumbler that would hold a quart was set before me.

"No, you ignoramus. That's to enable you to swirl it round and enjoy the ethers. Try that. There, isn't that rounder? Isn't that fuller than the other?"

I laughed at him. Men are so religious about wine. They're religious about all their pleasures. After lunch, I looked round this small, pleasant room with whitewashed walls and

mahogany furniture, feeling content. My head had stopped aching; food often helps.

"Let's go into the garden," he said, "and have coffee there."

It was rather a small garden, sloping up from the house. First a little flagged place, where poles betrayed that Mrs. Anslow hung out washing. Then a little gravel terrace under a monkey tree. Then a neglected lawn, surrounded by a great plantation of hollyhocks that spread their cockades against an old white wall.

We sat for a time under the monkey tree with coffee and liqueurs. He seemed to find it natural that I should call on him so suddenly. He didn't try to question me. Indeed, he seemed preoccupied with his own affairs, with the share that he had taken in a Scottish grouse moor. He was quite excited about the 12th, only six weeks off, and looked forward to the "stey braes." "Though," he said, "they wind me in the end. I'm getting old and fat." He was enthusiastic.

"You've never shot in Scotland, have you? Oh, it's heaven! To see your setter searching and quartering round; see him stand as if he was made of stone, breathing in the scent, while his lips sort of twitch; see him slither along very quietly, sort of stalking. . . . And then, all the wings making a whir as the covey rises. Bang! Bang! Ah! Both barrels!"

I said nothing. I wanted to humor him and to talk of the things that pleased him, but the wine and the liqueur emboldened me. Alcohol swells up one's ego. I wanted to talk of *my* affairs. But I couldn't quite, and so began:

"I was drunk last night."

"Oh!"

"I did it on purpose."

"One does when one's unhappy."

"I didn't say I was unhappy."

"Just as you like."

The coldness with which he said that upset me, but I managed to steady my voice and to say: "Yes. One gets

disappointed in people." As he was silent, in a rush of emotion I told him everything, not only how Julian had bilked the cabman, but much of the rest — the ignominy of my life with him, his coolness, his infidelity. I see myself sitting under that tree, my head forward, very intent, talking, talking. I am telling him all the things that matter and many that don't. Nice things that Julian said and did, irrelevant facts about Tootoo and Sadie. "I wonder what I'm going to do." I review my resources and end by talking of frocks. I am pitiful, foolish, quite unstrung. But he seems to understand.

When I'd done he looked at me critically and said, "You're very good-looking, Ursula."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Thought so from the first moment I met you."

"How could you! I was hideous then, after . . . I'd been ill. I looked awful."

"I thought you beautiful."

I looked at him softly. It's nice to be thought beautiful when one is beautiful, but how delicious to be thought beautiful when one isn't.

"I'm going to leave Julian," I said, irrelevantly.

"Yes."

"I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I do."

I said nothing for a moment. One's nervous then. Feebly I said: "How? What?"

"You're going to marry me."

I knew he was going to say that, but all the same he surprised me. For he looked at the same time tender and roguish. There was bright merriment in his eyes, and his blunt, pleasant face was all alive. He looked so sturdy and assured, as he lounged in a deck chair, with his well-tended workman's hands clasped before him. After a moment he went on, "You're not surprised, are you?'

"No."

"I wanted to say that to you the second day at Notley. But I couldn't."

A sudden curiosity flooded me. I had an absurd vision of some entanglement of his. So I had to ask, "Why?"

"Oh, well, you weren't free. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I knew quite well how things were with you. But I didn't want you like that. I wanted you to come to me free." As I said nothing he added, "Well, that's settled, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," I said. I was disappointed. Not so much because he was unemotional; the right kind of man is. But why wasn't I more emotional? There I sat opposite him, making the biggest decision in my life, and that was all. I ought to have known him better, to have realized his strong restraints, to have understood that he was epicure enough to defer his own delights, if only a moment.

Indeed, it was only a moment, for half lazily he got out of his chair . . . and this is a testimony that I loved him. I thought his movement graceful, though he was getting out of a deck chair. He came to my side, bent over me, put an arm round my waist, drew me to my feet, and led me across the lawn, where the brilliant hollyhocks made a benevolent screen. With his arms about me and the lips which had pressed mine still pressed against my cheek, I knew indeed that I had not come to him out of loneliness, that really I loved this man, everything of him, that, standing so, my head against his shoulder, I was no longer the prey of my senses, the martyr of my æstheticism, that he had conquered in me something that no other man had ever seen, the fugitive thing we call the heart, the unlikely thing we call the soul. I didn't see so clearly, then. Then I knew only complete happiness, entire fulfillment. Body and mind, he pleased me. I wanted nothing better than so to stay in the hard ring of his arms until the last shadow lengthens upon the last day.

IV

When at last he released me, when at last the emotion of love attained and the power of caresses had been merged into satisfaction, he said:

"Nuisance to-day being Sunday. Can't get a special license until to-morrow. Still, we can be married on Tuesday."

"Oh no!" I said. I don't know why. "Not quite yet, Alec."

"Why not? We're going to do it. Why not do it now?"

"Yes, I know. But one waits a little, doesn't one?"

"One does sometimes. I suppose I'd better send you to your mamma, in charge of one of my aunts. I could propose again there, if you like, and we could be engaged for two or three years."

"Don't be absurd," I said. "I only mean that it's such a rush."

"I'm in a hurry."

What could I say? That is such an argument. So I smiled and said: "All right. But what about my things? Don't you think we'd better go to the flat and pack? Julian won't be home till to-morrow morning, so there 'll be no bother."

"All right. I'll ring for a taxi. Of course, it's not properly romantic, what you suggest. What I ought to say is this: 'No, my dearest, our love is too pure and too beautiful for us to slink into the place where you have known misery. I will face the author of your miseries. I, your most aged slippers in my hand, will say, 'Stand back, caitiff, the girl is mine.' That would be romance, but romance is highly inconvenient, and to-morrow morning I must see two builders. So let us slink."

I stopped him before we went, to murmur another confession. I was encouraged to this by his reference to the conditions in which I had lived. I didn't want him to misunderstand me. I wanted to come to him really free. So I said:

"Alec, you said you wanted to come to me free. Well, I want to come free of secrets. Did you know when you met me at Walmer that I'd been going to have a child?"

"Yes, of course I knew."

"Does it matter?"

He hesitated for a second. "Well, I don't want to pretend to be modern and say that it doesn't matter. Of course, I'd rather it had been my child. But then . . . if you hadn't

gone through all you have you wouldn't be what you are." He flung his arms round me and pressed me to him with a new violence: "No, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters if it's made you what you are, the only woman in the world that I could love if she was old, if she was ugly, if she was lying, if she was faithless. See what I mean? It's just because nothing matters that I know I love you as I didn't know I could love a woman."

Chapter VI

Now Dismiss

I

HOW young I am, experienced woman! Now dismiss! How absurd! As if one ever were dismissed. But I can't think of anything else just now. I remember what Alec said when he leaned over my shoulder as I finished the first chapter of my story—"The best chapters are still unwritten." And again I say: "I'm thirty, nearly. I wonder?" Do I wonder? But, there, I don't feel intellectual! I'm too newly wed to ask myself questions such as: "Why am I? Why am I what I am? And, if so, how?" That may come later.

Just now I am too happy, almost frightened of my happiness, and I understand the old story of the tyrant of Samos, who, to propitiate the fate which had given him too much, threw his ring into the sea. A lot of good that would do me; it would only come back in a kipper.

Now! I mustn't think of kippers. I'm a young wife who loves her husband, who has emerged into happiness after much misery. A sense of humor is out of place. Let me be rhapsodic. No, I can't do it. I'm happy to the point of singing and dancing with happiness, but I can't dodge comedy. I'm not a nice girl. Curiously enough, Isabel is much more rhapsodic than I am. I expect she's so relieved. We had a conversation this morning, when she came to see me after Alec and I returned from a visit to Ciber Court—our first, three months after our wedding.

"Well, how did it go off?"

"All right."

"Did they like him?"

"Of course they liked him."

She laughed at me. "Of course you'd think that, being a bit prejudiced. But tell me, really, are you sure they liked him?"

"Well, papa took him away after dinner to play billiards with him. And I gathered that papa told mamma, who told her new maid, who told the servants' hall, which radiated toward the stables and the garden, where I finally collected it from old Diss, who is still a father to me, that I might have done worse."

"I expect it was a bit more cordial than that," said Isabel, laughing. "But then Diss comes from Cumberland and isn't good at saying pretty things."

"I think papa likes him very much. He said to me: "Your husband doesn't seem to care much for politics. Perhaps it's quite as well; it 'll stop him voting on the wrong side."

"That settled it," said Isabel. "But what about mamma?"

I giggled. "I don't think mamma much minds whom I've married, so long as I am married. She's still a little suspicious. She said the marriage had been very hurried. Why was it so hurried? What church did we go to? Oh! What church did I say? What street was it in?"

"Did she ask to see your marriage lines?"

"No, she isn't as bad as that; but it's such a relief to her to think I'm really married that she wants to chew the cud of her satisfaction."

"No wonder," said Isabel. "It's so convenient to be married."

"Now, Isabel, don't thrust any confidences on me. I'm a respectable woman."

"Quite so. Reformed rakes are always dragons of virtue."

"You're being rude, and, by the way, were you not a dragon of virtue before you married? Might I not say that a reformed dragon . . ."

"All right. I call this struggle off. Tell me about Alec. Do you like him?"

"Oh, I think he'll do."

"With a little managing."

"All men need managing."

"Yes," said Isabel, "they do." She grew reflective. "It's quite an art, managing a husband, but it's overrated. I'm sure it's easier than managing a hotel. You may not think it, but Gervers started very domineering. He wouldn't have this and he wouldn't have that and he'd be master in his own house."

"What did you say?"

"Oh," replied Isabel, "I said, 'Yes, dear!'"

I laughed. "How I know that 'Yes, dear'! What a negative it contains!"

"One mustn't give that away," said Isabel. "A good idea is to demand the thing you don't want. Then they'll force you to have your own way. Always pull a mule by the tail to make it go forward. I suppose you know that, Ursula? But let me give you a tip. Never do your husband out of a row."

"Oh! That's new!"

"It won't be new by and by. The day when your husband comes back wanting a row, something's happened and he's been done out of his row. I saw a cartoon in *The Bystander* the other day, of a man coming home with a conjugal expression on his face and saying: 'If she's gone to bed, I'll go for her for not sitting up for me. And if she *is* sitting up for me, I'll go for her for wasting the electric light.'"

"What is one to do in these cases? What is the Isabel system?"

"Weep. They love it. They think it serves you out, never mind for what, but it serves you out. After a little time, during which they rejoice in having administered just punishment, they become magnanimous. You get kissed and comforted. Next day, according to the exchequer, four rows of pearls or a penny bunch of violets."

"I'll remember that. But I don't think Alec will ever go for me."

"He may be a monster. My feeling about Alec is that he's too fond of you. Fond husbands are an awful nuisance.

If they get it badly, one has to find somebody else. Fortunately Gervers prefers golf. I'm afraid Alec likes meeting you at breakfast."

"Of course he does."

"That's a pity. Do you walk with him to the Tube? Yes, I thought so. Lunch with him in Holborn, of course. Do your shopping in Holborn and meet him in a teashop? Well, when you're tired of that, and he isn't, never say you won't do it. Don't say 'sha'n't'; it's rude. Say, 'Yes, dear!' Then say the cook has given notice. Burst the boiler, or poison the dog, but don't say 'sha'n't.' That merely makes the situation impossible."

"That sounds sensible, but have you never had a wrangle with Gervers?"

"Never. He's had wrangles with me, but I wasn't going to wear the bloom off our beautiful married life. You see, I'm very fond of Gervers. He's kind and not at all stupid. But I'm just a little cleverer. And I play fair with him. It may not always be very nice for me to be married to Gervers, but it may be rather hard for Gervers to be married to *me*. I make allowances."

"You mean you lead him by the nose."

"Not at all. I let him be boss in all the things that I care nothing about. He had a fit of economy the other day and brought me home in a tram. I knew that we should be a quarter of an hour late for dinner and that he'd be mad. But I didn't say so. If I'd told him, he'd have been obstinate, gone in the tram all the same, eaten his spoiled dinner, and hated me all the evening because I'd been right. Always be in the wrong, Ursula. It confirms your husband in the belief that he is always in the right."

"So much for Gervers, but Alec is quite different."

"They're all different, but all the same. If they're old bachelors they want a little free time away from their wives, because they're used to it; if they're young bachelors, they want a little free time because they haven't had enough of it. If they haven't been comfortable, they want to be well looked after for a change; if they've been comfortable,

they want to go on. Men all want the same thing. They have different names for it. Even in love, one man calls it pure passion, and the other one passionate purity. I call it whatever Gervers likes."

"I see. Alec says we're all materialists and don't bother about labels."

"Does he? That's bad. Can it be that you've got hold of a man who understands women?"

"I think he guesses my thoughts sometimes."

"That's a nuisance. That kind is too clever. I think you'd better make a point of always doing the obvious thing and never telling a lie. When they're clever, like Alec, that baffles them."

"I don't want to baffle him."

"One doesn't at first. One even likes them to notice one's clothes."

"I do. Alec made me change my hat yesterday; he said he wouldn't be seen dead with me in that hat."

"Oh," said Isabel, "that's a difficult point. I'm not quite sure whether I prefer the man who curses my new hat or the one who doesn't notice that it is a new hat. On the whole, I think the Alec type is better. You just turn the hat back to front, and it's taken in at once."

"Isabel," I said, solemnly, "you don't understand. You're so matter-of-fact. You weren't in love with Gervers."

"I believe you once said that I was crazy for him when I married him."

"Not as I am for Alec."

"Not being in love with Alec myself, so far, I can't say. But I'm a very good wife. I take an interest in Gervers's work, which I must say isn't much; if he has wrongs I burn with them; I never read *Punch*, so that he may tell me some fresh jokes, and I walk miles over wet links with him when I want to meet another member of his club. And I'm never affectionate."

"Didn't Gervers ever want you to be affectionate?"

"He did. He still does. He always will if I'm not. And so will Alec. Don't sit up for him if he has to go to a meeting

of—what is it?—the Royal Institute of British Architects. Don't make him feel that if he stops out late you'll be wearing your heart out, or whatever it is. Don't run down in your chemise when you hear his key in the lock. He's probably hot and dirty and has planned to wash and brush his hair, to look charming, and to wake you with a kiss. Let him kiss you; don't kiss him except as a favor. At his approach, always be off, but not too fast. Keep a hold of your independence; be steady; but be ready whenever he inclines toward you. One to be ready, two to be steady, and three to be off, I think those are the rules which enable one to be happy though married."

II

She's a cynic. Oh, Isabel knows how to run her life. I'm no match for her. She's kept me on the edge of her secret world. She is wiser than I was. I did everything openly; I ,was an adventuress, and muddled; I have no technic. Isabel is all technic, while I am all emotion. Perhaps she puts more into life and I get more out of it. No, she doesn't understand, nobody understands who hasn't had a bad time, who never wants to say, "Now dismiss." Nothing that I said to Isabel, and nothing that I can write here, can quite express what Alec gives me, means to me. I'm not trapped by my temperament. Indeed he is my lover, and I could not wish a fonder, or one that can make in me an emotion so complete. But he is to me a man as well as a lover. He is my companion and my dear. I wish I could tell him how dear he is to me, my workaday lover, my comrade, my future and my reality.

Here we are, we two, not unbeautiful, not stupid, well off enough, interested in this film in a million reels that we call life. What is going to become of us? What are we? How shall we govern our life, that have governed it ill enough separately, and must face the heavier task of governing two strands laid together? I think we shall succeed, because I love him enough to smile at him, to understand that he is

my child. Every woman has a child on her wedding day. He is, I say it again, reality. He is blunt and truthful; he makes life possible.

How should we lead our life? And what are the things which rule it? Does love rule it? Yes, so far as the music of the spheres makes a chorus to the spinning world. Does congenial occupation rule it? Yes, so far as one is content with a good task done, as the carpenter with a perfect joint, with a sort of harmony of effort. Does wealth rule it? Yes, so far as one is not too poor, and compelled to think only of money, not too rich, and compelled to think only of spending it. But is there not something else? The knowledge that makes life actual? Something we all need, and which love alone now and then can emulate? Perhaps we are all whirling atoms apart from an Eternal Purpose and aching for Him. But I don't believe in the copybook gods. I am neither Christian, Jew, Moslem, nor pagan. I don't believe in anything conscious that makes us, molds us, and absorbs us. We are atoms lost in the void, that now and then come together. It is sweet and good, that drawing together. For a moment we compass eternity. It is enough. It is good enough. I will whirl no more. I have found this unity. I am in the shadowy vestibule, itself an infinity, which leads into another infinity. Together, Alec and I, mutually assured, we enter life, life which is a house of cloud, that dispels our breath, and, in a stranger shape, forms again. Oh, house of cloud fit habitation for spirits gladly bound in subtle chains!

THE END

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